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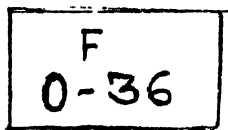
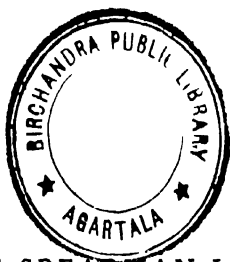
*By the same author :*

**THE RED SAILOR**



# GOD CAME ON FRIDAY

PATRICK O'HARA



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both the characters and their names are  
fictitious. If the name of any living person  
has been used, the use was purely accidental.**

**PATRICK O'HARA**



THE BAR WAS on the corner of the long hill that went up into the city. Back along the street away from the hill, on the other side in the sun, was Freddy Shimokovak's betting-shop. Out front of the shop were the bums against the wall in the sunlight with the form for the night meeting out at Longview Park. Nowhere was it busy, and the heavy all-night trunk service had not yet begun the long pull up-hill from the waterfront. All the Island was quiet and the dust settling in the warm evening and the smell of the river with the sun on it.

Outside the bar were more bums standing around putting the touch on any soft-looking mark going by on the hill. There were some pretty tough-looking boys amongst them and the biggest was this Willi Bischof. Bischof was an ex-prize fighter, big and wide but thick through the middle now. Then the door of the bar opened and this boy Frankie came out. Bischof saw him put the bottle away.

'Hey' he said. 'What you got there?'

'You talking to me?' this boy Frankie says.

Bischof reached out and grabbed him by the front of his windjammer. Frankie went with it and let go a right-hand low to the belly. You could hear it land way down the other end of the street. Bischof looked if he been shot. Frankie stepped back and hit a long one with the left to the mouth. Bischof went down against the wall. Nobody moved. Frankie turned and started across the street, the bums out front of Freddy's place watching him walk, sort of flat-footed, heels on the ground, his head a

little to the right and his chin down; Frankie, white faced, and the sun on him now as he walked.

Inside the shop there were more bums and it gloomy and the air bad. Freddy sat in his shirt sleeves at the table and saw him come in.

Well, well, thought Freddy. What do we have now? Freddy was a thinker.

Frankie put his money down and says : 'Prince Cloud. To win.'

What do you know? thought Freddy. Now we have one with money.

Frankie watching him count it, says : 'Well.'

'Sure,' said Freddy, and wrote out the ticket.

Frankie put the copy in his pocket and went out. Freddy watched him go.

Then Long John came in and said to Freddy : 'Some boy.' And standing in the doorway, watched Frankie walk down the street.

'The living dead,' said Freddy The Thinker.

'Know what he just done?' said Long John coming in from the doorway.

'Shot himself,' said Freddy.

'Just flattened Bischof,' Long John said, proudly.

'Go on,' Freddy talking up to him. 'Bischof?'

'One, two! Bang! Out!' said Long John demonstrating with the long-arm stance.

'Bischof?'

'That's right.'

Freddy got up and took a look out the doorway. Across on the corner they were helping Bischof to his feet.

'Well, isn't that worth seeing now,' said Freddy, smiling big.

'Some boy,' Long John said, proudly. 'I've got to tell Madden about this one.'

Frankie went on down the street, the bottle inside his windjammer cool against him through the sweat shirt. Most of the buildings in the street were warehouses, high and grey and their windows not reflecting the sun. He

stopped and sat on a fire-hydrant out through the wall of a granary. Orma Clark's place was across the street and somebody inside playing an out-of-tune piano. The smell of stale beer and damp sawdust carried out in the warm air. The smell of the river was strong too.

He took a piece of Polish sausage from the pocket of his windjammer and unwrapped it. Further down the street, a number of bums stood outside The House of Nazareth waiting to go in to bed. Next door was a Chinese laundry. Two Chinamen squatted in the doorway eating rice, the bowls held high and pushing the rice with chopsticks directly into their mouths from the bowls. Down the end of the street on the waterfront, were stacked white-wood battens. Towering above the battens were the for'ard derricks of a freighter. He sat with his shoes off and the warm air feeling cool on his feet. The only sound was the piano-playing from the bar. His feet made damp marks on the dusty paving. It was very pleasant sat in the sun with your shoes off eating Polish sausage and listening to an out-of-tune piano.

THE HOUSE OF NAZARETH was damp-smelling and ill-lit. All of it was cement floored and the walls yellow ochred. In the room were eight beds. When he came in, an old man was sitting up in the bed by the door talking to Long John. They stopped talking when they saw him, Long John smiling, and the old man watching him walk to his bed.

'You done it all right,' said Long John, smiling.

Frankie undressed, then folded his clothes and put them under the pillow.

'You done it all right,' Long John said, louder this time and still smiling. Frankie swung his legs under the grey blanket, found the bottle, took a long one, then put the bottle back.

'How are you?' said Long John, giving it a last try.

'You talking to me?' says Frankie, his lips not moving and the words mumbled.

That brightened Long John considerably because he gave that rare smile again, and said : 'I never saw Bischof get his before.'

Frankie stretched out full-length.

The old man was still sitting up in bed following the one-sided conversation but not saying anything.

'You done a good job. That right, Madden?' said Long John, looking for help. Madden cleared his throat.

'See?' said Long John.

It went quiet again and they watched him take another long one out the bottle.

'I was just telling Madden here,' said Long John, quietly and not sure of it any more. 'Bischof was running this place. That right?'

'You could say that,' said Madden.

Somewhere out in the hall water ran into a cistern. Frankie lay on his back with his hands behind his head, looking at the ceiling.

'Just come in town?' said Long John, now standing by the foot of the bed.

'What you want to know?' says Frankie still looking at the ceiling. Long John looked to Madden. It was quiet again and the water stopped running into the cistern.

'Long John's all right, boy,' said Madden.

Frankie took another long one with his head still on the pillow, then carefully corked the bottle and threw it up to Long John. 'Now go talk to yourself,' says Frankie, and turned onto his side.

'Thanks. Thanks a lot,' said Long John. Then to Madden, and smiling big, said 'He's a good one. I told you he was a good one.'



Madden lay back and closed his eyes. The room was quiet again and no noise was coming in from outside; and only Long John sat on his bed with the bottle and smiling big to himself.

WHEN FRANKIE WOKE next morning it was raining. The air was bad and smelled of sweat and feet. Long John was awake and sitting on the edge of his bed pulling on an old pair of army trousers over long woollen under-drawers. Long John saw him awake and smiled. Frankie got up and dressed. The rain beat against the windows. Long John lit a hand-made cigarette and started coughing. When he finally stopped, he had to sit back down and rest. As Frankie went out he saw old man Madden's bed empty.

Standing in the doorway, he watched the rain falling out on the street. The wind blew off the river and brought the rain with it. Then he saw Madden come across the street, a newspaper folded under his raincoat and the raincoat blowing out in the wind.

'That's some day,' said Madden as he came up the steps.

'Yeah. Bad all summer,' says Frankie. 'That today's?' Madden reached the newspaper out to him.

'Don't read much,' says Frankie. 'Know what won the eight-thirty last night?' Madden turned the newspaper to the sports page and found the race results.

'Prince Cloud. Four to one.'

'What you know?' says Frankie. 'Four to one.'

'You caught it?' asked Madden.

Frankie nodded. Then he says: 'Say, any place here you can eat?'

'There's a place on the dock that's pretty good. It's cheap too.'

'You ate yet?' Frankie says.

'Never envy what you can't have,' said Madden.

'You want to eat with me?'

Madden looked up at the white face. 'Thanks. But I don't take hand-outs.'

'This is no hand-out. I ask you want to eat with me.'

Madden looked out at the rain falling.

'Come on,' says Frankie. 'Take much longer make your mind up it going be dinner-time.'

Madden smiled sadly. They went out into the rain, Madden only reaching to Frankie's shoulder; one thin, the other big and wide-shouldered, and them walking with their heads down against the rain.

They sat in the eating-house at a table in the window eating steak and fried eggs. Frankie ate steadily, his mind no further than the plate. Every so often Madden would stop like to say something, then change his mind. Next time he stopped, Frankie says: 'What bothering you, Madden?'

Madden cleared his throat. 'Well seeing you asked - you going to be around long?'

'In't thought 'bout it,' says Frankie, wiping egg-yolk up with bread.

'You want a job? You don't look a bum.'

'You don't look no bum neither,' says Frankie.

Madden shrugged and went back to eating.

From the window Frankie watched a big freighter come through the lock-gates of the Jamaica Dock across the river. The freighter was old and rode high in the grey water.

Madden watched him. 'Thinking about going to sea?'

'No. You ever go?'

'I get sick looking at water.'

'That Long John could use soap with his,' says Frankie.

'Oh, he's all right.'

'Sure,' Frankie says, 'Everybody's all right.'

It was still raining. They walked back along the waterfront, then turned left down a side-street. They came out onto the hill on the way up from the Island to the city. As they walked, Madden said : 'Been up the city before?'

'Only come in yesterday. All I see was the freight-yards.'

The road up the hill was wide and plenty traffic using it. Three buses went by, close on each other, tyres hissing on the wet macadam and a fine spray rising under the wheels. The wind was warm, but the sky was low and grey and the rain falling that way made everything gloomy even on a steak and egg breakfast.

'I know a place where we can sit out of the rain and drink tea,' said Madden. 'I can buy the tea.'

They broke into a run and passed a big old-fashioned bar and a barman with a raincoat over his head washing the windows with a long-handled brush.

'Scrambled,' says Frankie.

'Who?' said Madden, jogging out front.

'Washing windows in this.'

'All publicans are scrambled. Knew a barman once who had nine kids to three barmaids.'

'That isn't scrambled,' says Frankie, 'That with eating garlic.'

Madden led the way. He did not move well when he ran. His elbows were up and out, his feet at right-angles, and him moving much the same as a down-at-the-heel penguin.

IN AT WEINBERGER'S GYM the air was thick with smoke and smelling of sweat and rubbing-liniment. A muffled-up heavyweight was right-handing the heavy bag by the door, and coming through the smoke and noise, the quick bickety bickety backety, bickety bickety backety of the speed bag. The heavyweight was red-faced and sweating, and his waist hanging over the waistband of his track trousers. Holding onto the bag the other side and moving with it every time it was hit, was the heavyweight's trainer; and him calling : 'Hup ! Hup ! Lower - hup ! No, higher, Al. Hup ! This time - hup !'

Two niggers skipped rope in middle of the floor. Up the far end of the gym was the ring and the lights overhead. Nobody was working the ring. A crowd was gathered around the apron. Ten or twelve fighters were exercising about the gym. On the walls were pictures of fighters and old fight posters.

The other end of the gym was screened by a hardboard partition. Inside was the tea-room and two snooker tables. Both tables were being played. Frankie and Madden sat at the counter. Two men wearing rumpled suits sat smoking cigarettes along the other end of the counter.

'What will you have?' Madden asked.

'What you afford?' says Frankie, looking around.

'Tea.'

'Then tea,' says Frankie. Frankie was a talker all right.

'Hello, Madden,' the red-faced one the other end of the counter said.

'I thought you would be dead too, Koenig,' Madden said to him. Then said to Frankie, 'Wonder where the girl's got?'

'Gone where all dolls go whose systems flush,' said the dark one, laughing. Koenig laughed with him.

The girl came out from the kitchen, looked at them, saw Frankie, and smiled. She smiled a pretty smile. She had big brown eyes, a bigger chest, and was wide-hipped. She was big all right.

Madden ordered.

'Work here steady?' Koenig asked the girl.

'Why?'

Koenig shrugged. 'I just wondered. I thought that when Griffon was through I could take you to lunch.'

'No thanks. I eat where there's safety in numbers.'

'Who these two jokers?' Frankie asked Madden.

'Newspapermen. They've come down to see Griffon.'

'Who's Griffon?'

'What! He's ninth in the middleweight division. That's who Griffon is.'

'Take it easy,' says Frankie. 'At least I heard 'bout Hennig and Billy Shorr.'

'And who hasn't?' asked Madden.

A polite hand of applause carried through the partition. Koenig and the dark one got up and went into the gym. The bell rang as they went out.

Then after a little :

'Come on. We'll go and take a look,' said Madden.

The gym was quiet now. Both fighters in the ring, wearing headgear, and up there under the lights. The sound of their breathing and scuffing of shoes carried with the thud of leather. They both took the first one easy, not getting much out of a walk. The bell ended the round and they turned back to their corners. Griffon was above them on a stool, relaxed, breathing rhythmically, a white sweated second and nail-man leaning through the ropes with him. Griffon sat with his head back against the cushion, wearing red shoes and blue and gold trunks and a white sweat shirt with BEN LEE in black across the front.

The bell rang. Both fighters got up and went out.

The other boy was tall and bony. He didn't carry much of a punch. He backed under Griffon's high left, fought a flurry, then faded. He was almost a head taller than Griffon. Griffon worked the high left jab. One, two – one, two, three. The left seemed glued to the boy's mouth. Then the boy took a couple of wild right swings at Griffon's head. Griffon ducked, moved inside and let go both hands to the body. The boy's mouth opened with them. He was bleeding badly around the mouth. With this boy, Griffon looked pretty good.

As Griffon came back a photographer climbed up on the apron and shot his picture as he hooked out the mouthpiece. He sat down, and the second wiped his face and ran the towel around back of his neck. Sweat was showing through the sweat shirt between the shoulders and under the arms. The newspapermen were on chairs alongside the apron and a couple of them taking notes. A fat man climbed in Griffon's corner.

'Sonny Bernstein,' said Madden, 'Griffon's manager. Before Griffon he had Al Morgan, and before that Danny Singer. Sonny done all right.'

Above them Griffon sat with his head back on the cushion.

'What do you think of him?' Madden went on.

'They could get somebody better to work with him,' Frankie says it as the talking hushed for the bell. His voice sounded awfully loud and alone.

'The boy do any better, Madden?' asked Koenig, laughing.

'What's it got to do with you?' Madden said right back.

'Sit down, fat man,' says Frankie.

The whole gym was watching it now.

'Somebody throw that bum out!' Koenig shouted.

Frankie walked right up to him and says: 'Sit down, fat man.' And brought his right hand out of his pocket quick and Koenig sat down all right. That was Frankie.

'Hey! What's going on?' shouted Bernstein.

The timekeeper rang the bell but the boys up there didn't move.

'Hey! What is this? What's going on?' Bernstein asked, coming around the apron.

'This bum says Mike's a plug,' said Koenig.

'He says?' said Bernstein, pointing at Frankie. 'Him!'

'I don't say he's a plug. I says they could get somebody better work with him. That what I says.'

'So you got it against Meyers?' Bernstein said, 'Meyers could give you a rough time.'

'He couldn't give his old girl a rough time,' Frankie says right back. 'But don't worry, mister. Your one'll look all right in the newspapers—why don't you take that hat off and comb his hair?' Nobody ever scared Frankie any.

Griffon was out of the ring and making for Frankie. Bernstein got between them.

'Let's get out of here,' said Madden.

Koenig made a big thing out of helping Bernstein hold Griffon back. Griffon was shouting: 'I could take him with one hand! One hand, Sonny. Christ, I could!' All the while Meyers was up there under the white lights, leaning on the ropes, and trying to follow it all.

'You better get him out of here before we turn Mike loose,' Koenig shouted at Madden.

Madden grabbed Frankie's arm.

'You mick bastard!' yelled Griffon.

'I know my old man,' says Frankie, 'I know him all right,' Frankie looked plenty tough with it.

'Get out of here!' shouted Bernstein.

'I'm going, mister. But don't get big ideas 'bout him,' says Frankie, jabbing his finger at Griffon.

'Wait a minute,' said Griffon, got a hold on himself now. 'What about you getting up there?'

'We come in here to get out the rain. We don't come in here get trouble,' says Frankie.

'You're all mouth,' said Griffon.

'I don't want trouble,' says Frankie, standing there with his hands in the pockets of his windjammer.

'We're going.' Madden had hold on Frankie.

Bernstein just looked at them. Koenig started laughing.

'Why don't you get a job writing up police-court drunks, Mr. Koenig?' The girl had come around from the far side of the ring. She was quite tall and slender. She was a very good-looking girl too, sort of Latin-looking, only she was not dark, and under the glare of the ring-lights her hair was something the colour of a rich tawny wine with the sun through it.

'We have a little trouble with this one, Miss Guerrero,' Bernstein said. 'He come in here and calls Mike no good.'

'Isn't he entitled to his opinions?' She had blue eyes that were maybe not blue but violet. She walked over to them. Everyone watched her walk. When she walked she moved wonderfully well. She wore a tight-fitting grey jersey suit and a loose coat across her shoulders. The coat did not hide her remarkable bosom. Her bosom moved splendidly when she walked.

Nobody said anything. Madden started backing Frankie towards the door.

'That's it,' said Koenig, 'get going!'

'One day someone is going to knock you down, Koenig,' said the girl. Then to Frankie said, 'You're not taking all this?'

Frankie looked at her, and the way she looked at him, he could not say anything.

'Hold on,' said Griffon, 'he started it. I asked him up there.'

She looked at Frankie.

'We only come in out the rain,' says Frankie.

'That's right,' said Madden, 'and we're going back out in the rain.'

She smiled.

Frankie cleared his throat. 'We only -'

'I know,' she said, 'You only came in out of the rain.' She turned and went toward the other side of the ring, walking well on the high heels.



‘– Okay,’ says Frankie, hearing the voice and it maybe not belonging to him anyway.

‘Pardon?’ she said, and looking at all of him with blue eyes that were not really blue but violet.

‘I’ll take him,’ Frankie says, and bitter with it, and her really something. Nobody said anything, but all of them watching it.

‘Don’t let me influence it any,’ she said, and her head held high.

‘Just feel bad ’bout it,’ says Frankie, dead-pan like always.

‘You’ll feel worse later,’ said Koenig.

That drew a big laugh.

‘You’re having nothing to do with this,’ said Madden.

‘Take it easy,’ says Frankie.

‘Don’t be a clown.’

‘I’ll go with him. They’re all big-shots. Well let them be big-shots,’ Frankie pushed Madden’s hand off his arm and went across to Bernstein. ‘You fit me out, mister? We going do this we might do it in style.’ The way Frankie talks it comes out mumbled and you know half of it but you have to figure the other half yourself.

‘I don’t like it,’ said Bernstein.

‘Cut this out,’ said Madden. ‘He’s never been anywhere near a prize fight.’

‘Do you know what you’re doing?’ said the girl to Frankie.

‘I get by,’ says Frankie.

‘I don’t like it,’ said Bernstein.

‘Fix him up, Sonny,’ Griffon looking on, said.

Bernstein looked at him. ‘All right. But I don’t like it any.’

Frankie followed Bernstein out to the dressing-room, everybody watching, then the talking, starting behind them. In the dressing-room were two rubbing-tables and a row of medicine cabinets on the end wall by the door back to the showers. Along the other wall were grey steel lockers and benches in front of them. He felt it now, in

his belly and in his breathing; and in the hot steamy air smelling of sweat and antiseptic and rubbing-liniment. He felt it. He saw it too, in the bare lights hung close to the white-glossed ceiling. Bernstein put a pair of black trunks and a protective cup on the bench.

'What size shoes?'

'Seven.' Frankie was stripped down to his blue denims, the upper-half of his body built like a heavyweight, the skin clear white and the muscles tightly defined. The door opened and Madden came in. 'Okay, Bernstein. I'll take it from here.'

Bernstein put the shoes on the bench and went out.

Frankie had the cup and trunks on now.

'Sure you know what you're doing?' said Madden.

'We soon going find out,' says Frankie, started on the shoes.

Madden went across to the cabinets and came back with some soiled gym bandage, tape, and scissors. 'I've met some bright boys in my time, but you take the cake—listen, he could kill you. He's been fighting pro about seven years.'

'You want me to bandage?'

Madden took the right hand and started bandaging. 'You look in pretty good shape. What do you weigh around?'

'Last time was one-sixty,' says Frankie, watching the bandaging.

Bernstein came in with a pair of regular fight gloves. He watched them finish the hands, then put the gloves on. Madden went across to the cabinet again and came back with a white rubber mouthpiece. Frankie fitted it in his mouth with his thumb. They were ready to go when this big fellow wearing a dark suit came in.

'Well, well. If it isn't Mr. Physical Culture himself,' he said, looking at Frankie. Then to Bernstein, said, 'I hear your boy's taking on all-comers.'

Bernstein went out disgusted.

'And how's Madden?'



‘What do you want, Gessler?’

‘I come in see who the boy was.’ Gessler’s nose was broken and his dark hair thinning at the front. He was plenty big and tough-looking.

Madden shoved past him and Frankie followed, Gessler watching them; Frankie wide-shouldered and with that curious walk.

GRIFFON HAD OFF the headgear and sweat shirt, moving around up there under the lights, rotating his shoulders and picking his feet up high, waiting. Madden climbed up on the apron and held the ropes apart for Frankie. Then this one called Bollinger climbed in the ring in shirt-sleeves, and said: ‘I got nothing to do with this. I’m only in here because I been asked. Anybody object to me?’ Nobody spoke. ‘Okay. Then we’ll get on with it.’ He turned to Frankie’s corner. ‘If you want to quit, sing out. Okay?’ Frankie nodded. Griffon stood with his back to the ring. ‘Okay, Griffon?’

‘I hear you,’ said Griffon over his shoulder.

‘Then keep the punches up and come out with the bell.’ Bollinger backed against the ropes on the far side and looked to the timekeeper.

‘Wait!’ shouted Gessler. ‘Anybody take me on the boy?’

‘You’re joking, Harry?’ said Bernstein, below Griffon’s corner.

‘It’s my money.’

‘We’ll take you,’ said Koenig, getting up

‘And me and Maloney.’ These two sitting on the chairs with the racing papers, said.

Mejers had his bathrobe on and was over by Bernstein.

'Go ahead when you're ready,' shouted Gessler.

'Remember he's a counter puncher,' said Madden. 'Let him come to you. When he does, back up. We can throw it the end of the round.'

Frankie stared right ahead, his white face not showing any of it, and like all the while you did not know whether he heard you or not.

The bell rang, and Griffon was out like to end it in nothing flat. Frankie wasn't much out of his corner and took three lefts straight in the face, the cross sliding off his mouth. He didn't even have his hands up. Then Griffon stuck the left in his face again and Frankie bulled in and hit a right-hand low under the ribs. You saw Griffon pull his head in with it. Griffon was so surprised he dropped his hands from up high and Frankie spun him around with a swinging left hook to the head. Griffon grabbed, and when Bollinger stepped in, he went way out in middle of the ring thinking it was maybe not what he thought after all. Frankie went after him, the curious walk more pronounced, hands wide apart, waist-high. Griffon jabbed him off with the left, then circled. Frankie turned flat-footed in middle of the ring. Griffon went in fast, one, two, three, then backing, the left still out. Frankie's right-hand missed by a yard. Frankie didn't move much. The way it looked, he didn't move at all most of the time. Then Griffon drew him on, lined him up, faked the left, and hooked a short right to the body. You could hear it come back off the walls. Frankie was down on one knee, over from the waist, his mouth open. Griffon stood back with the right hand cocked. Frankie heard the voice close to his head and he looked out the tops of his eyes at Bollinger counting it with his arm - five - six - . Frankie had his knee off the canvas at eight. Something hit him on the head and there were lights and a locomotive engine roaring through a long dark tunnel. Then he saw the faces, blurred and far away. He couldn't feel any of himself. Suddenly everything tilted and swung first one way, then the other, very slowly. He

blinked his eyes into vision and saw two Griffons out in middle of the ring, standing close together, grinning at him. Somebody took his arm and they walked a long walk together.

He was sat on the stool. Madden had the mouthpiece out.

'Hear me?' Madden shouted in his face. 'You hear me? Do you know me?' He heard somebody laugh. He heard it. Down below he saw faces turned toward him. Madden and Bollinger leaned over him.

'What is it?' he says.

'It's all over,' said Madden into his face. 'We're through.'

'What is it?' he says to Bollinger.

Bollinger smiled to him. 'What's what?'

'The round?' He saw Griffon now, standing across in his corner.

'We're all through,' said Madden.

'I beat the count?'

'Time beat you both,' said Bollinger.

Frankie shoved between them. Madden grabbed his arm. Plenty noise came up from the ringside.

'You want to go on?' Bollinger asked, unbelieving.

'He in't beat me yet,' says Frankie, pushing Madden off him.

'It's your funeral, kid,' said Bollinger, motioning the timekeeper.

Griffon came out on his toes, gloves high. Frankie took the left in the face, bulled inside and hit both hands to the belly. Griffon tied him up, then Frankie got his right hand loose and uppercutted. Griffon didn't like any of this close-in stuff. They broke, and right off Griffon jammed the left in Frankie's face. The left in the face didn't bother Frankie. He took it next time too, and the cross high on the head. He got home with his left hook, low down. Every time Frankie landed to the body Griffon's head went with it. He wanted it at long-range and Frankie doing the leading. All this bullying didn't

go with him at all. Frankie rushed him again and landed a looping right hand as near the kidney as he could. He didn't pull any of that fancy stuff, but when he hooked, you heard it as bad as Griffon felt it. He was a hooker all right. You could hit him, but you had to hit from the front. The round ended with Griffon circling and trying to pick a clear shot.

Blood was blowing in Frankie's nose every time he breathed. Madden got his head back and the sponge working. Frankie hooked the mouthpiece out with his thumb. He could taste the blood in the back of his throat.

Madden was talking while he worked. 'Get a little lower. You're too upright. Wait till he starts to throw the right, then rush him. You've got him cold on the inside. If the right starts to drop, switch the left to his head. You're doing all right. Christ you are. What you've got to -'

'Don't tell me. Show me is all right. But don't tell me.' He sat up and spat in the pail out on the apron. Madden ran the sponge around back of his neck.

The bell rang. The crowd gave them a hand. Griffon went straight out and stuck the left in Frankie's face. Griffon carried his right hand lower now, ready to drop across his body when the left hook came. The hooking had him plenty worried. This Frankie came away with everything never intended. He was all set to throw the right and Frankie hit him with head, shoulders, chest and gloves. He spread his arms and grabbed. Frankie swung him on to the ropes, jammed his head back with the left and clubbed him with a right over the heart. Bollinger pushed Frankie off. Griffon was on his knees, left arm entwined about the top rope. He stayed till seven, then rose slowly, his eyes never leaving Frankie. Bollinger waved them on. Frankie rushed it and ran straight into a right hand. He felt he had ran into a wall, the insides of his head all broke loose and came off the back of his skull. Everywhere was lights and the roaring of the locomotive engine in the long dark tunnel and him hold-

ing on to something hammering him in the belly. Now everything was red. He started swinging. He was landing. He could feel it. Then somebody grabbed his arms. He got the left loose and tried to wipe away the red curtain. He could hear nothing but the roaring and his head all loose that way inside. Suddenly he saw Griffon. Griffon hit him. Then he hit Griffon. They were up in Griffon's corner throwing everything they had. Frankie was yelling and nothing recognizable. Then he would get the left glove up and wipe away the blood pouring into his eyes. Griffon tried to shove him off and Frankie grabbed him by the throat with his left and smashed the right in his face from way back. Griffon's mouthpiece came out. Bollinger shoved between them and stopped the next right-hand behind the ear. He went down like dead. All Frankie saw was Griffon hanging on the ropes. He dropped the right and hooked, low and up and feeling it go all the way in under the ribs, feeling the ribs come over his wrist. Griffon jack-knifed on to his face. Frankie never saw him go down. He was still in there swinging away with both hands. Everywhere was a red curtain again and noise and somebody dragging him across the ring, the back of his head open and a breeze blowing in. Somebody was yelling at him and somebody else dragging him somewhere; all of it noise and the insides of his head broken loose that way and slopping around in the breeze.

WHEN HE OPENED his eyes the first face he saw belonged to somebody looking down at him through spectacles.

'How do feel?'

He moved his eyes and saw Madden. 'Some head.' He

tried to sit up. The one wearing spectacles pushed him back. 'Hey, what we doing?' he says.

'Just lie still a while,' said the bespectacled one.

'Who are you, mister?'

'This is Doc Williams,' said Madden. 'He just sewed you up.'

Frankie put a hand up and fe't the taped down gauze pad over his left eye.

'There's seven stitches in there,' Williams said. 'Go easy with them.'

'What happened?'

'Griffon hit you. But I did a pretty job on it. If that's any recompense.'

Frankie eased himself up on the table and looked around. 'Where's Griffon?'

'He's gone to hospital,' said Williams. 'Him and Bollinger.'

Frankie swung his legs over the side of the rubbing-table. 'Who's Bollinger?'

Williams laughed. 'That was the referee. You flattened him along with Griffon.'

Frankie looked at him, then Madden.

'That's right,' said Madden. 'That was just before the riot.' Winking to Williams.

Williams stopped putting his instruments back in his bag. 'You'll go down in the history of Weinbergers. There's no doubt about that.'

'What you talking 'bout?' says Frankie.

'That's true,' said Madden. 'They just took them off in the blood-wagon.'

'I did that?'

'Sure you did. But never mind that now, let's get dressed.'

Madden helped Frankie dress.

Williams was ready to leave. 'I've given Madden some tablets for your head but if it gets worse or you don't feel any better, give me a call.' He put his card in one of the pockets of the windjammer. 'Anyway, you better come



and see me the end of the week. These stitches will probably be ready to come out then.'

'Thanks, Mr. Williams. Thanks a lot.'

'Look after him, Madden.'

Williams passed Gessler in the doorway.

'How does it go?' said Gessler, smiling.

'Fine till you came in,' said Madden.

'Don't be like that, friend.' Then to Frankie: 'I don't know where in hell you learned to fight. But Jesus Christ, I'd back you against the Marines.' He went into a fit of laughter. 'Bollinger - See Bollinger, Madden? Stiff as a board.' He went into the laughing again, holding his belly with both hands and shaking with it. 'You'll never see a brawl like that in another twenty years - Jesus Christ!' Even Madden was grinning now.

Frankie was watching. 'What so funny?' he says.

'Nothing,' said Gessler. 'Nothing at all. You're the most unfunny thing that's happened to a lot of big-shots in years. I been around this game a long time and I never met anything quite like you, kid.'

The crowd was still around the ring. The talking stopped as they came out and went on out to the car. It was still raining. The wind blew the rain up the long hill. Frankie felt the rain cold on his face. He could smell the river in the wind too.

The big car was parked a little way up the hill. Gessler held the door while Frankie and Madden climbed in the back. The seat was low and Frankie went deep when he sat down. Gessler got in and started the motor. The rain was loud on the roof.

'How do you feel now?' Gessler asked.

'Like I been run down,' says Frankie with his head back on the seat. Gessler leaned over and put the money in his hand.

'What's this for?'

'The; owed it you after that. Right, Madden?'

'I do 't want it,' says Frankie.

'Put it in your pocket,' said Madden. 'He can afford it.'

Gessler laughed. 'Where to?'

'You know where to all right,' said Madden.

Gessler looked at Frankie. 'You don't have to stop there now. I know a place on the hill here. Bunny Jacob's place. It's not much but it's better than the House.'

'Madden comes too,' says Frankie.

Gessler looked at Madden. 'Al! right with you?'

'Sure,' says Frankie. 'Go ahead.'

THE HOUSE WAS next door to the offices of the Stevedores' Union. The room was on the top floor and overlooked the hill. Over the back of the room were two iron-framed beds with patchwork covers. There were two wooden chairs, a dressing-table, and a gas fire. The pattern was worn off the pink linoleum in most places. Two cords from the light-point in the ceiling hung over the beds.

Jacobs was an old bantamweight.

'It's clean. You can see it's clean,' he said.

'It's okay,' says Frankie.

'Through back is the kitchen. You can use what you find there. The bathroom's across the hall. You want hot water you put the money in the box.' Frankie paid him a month's rent. Jacobs went out happy. His face was all broken and he carried plenty rubber in his legs when he walked.

'He's got a happy disposition,' said Madden.

'At least it's not one them other places.'

Madden tried the beds. Frankie took a look out the window. Out there were grey-slatted roofs and the rain on them and the rain falling between the buildings on to the

hill. On the other side of the roadway was a ladies' hair-dressing salon with a long plate glass window and a red velvet curtain draped on one side and stools inside the door with two ash-blondes wearing pink overalls sitting on the stools and displaying their knees. Out front was the sign : A N D R É - P A R I S.

'Sure that's a barber?' said Madden now at the window.

'You don't get fellows going in a place like that.'

'No?' said Madden, grinning. 'Stick around.' Then changing the subject, 'Why don't you get some sleep?'

Frankie watched the rain falling. 'Think I should?'

'You'll feel better for it.'

'You really know something about this business, don't you?'

'You don't do so bad yourself.'

'How long you been with it?'

'We'll talk about it later. Just now you get some sleep.'

'Okay, I'll take your word for it.'

'You do that. I'll take a look round the rest of the place.'

When he came back Frankie was in bed. The only sound in the room was the rain in the wind on the window.

'We got any light?' says Frankie.

Madden found the light switch behind the door. 'This Jacobs don't give anything away free.'

'You'll get money in the windjammer.'

'We got a coloured fellow next door. I heard him talking to somebody as I came by.'

'You better get the fire working as well. There got be a box for that some place. Wonder if there's one before the chain pulls?' They both laughed. Madden picked up the windjammer.

'While you about it you maybe get us something to eat, huh?'

'Anything in particular you want?'

Frankie grinned. 'You probably got ideas 'bout that too.'

Madden straightened up, and looking at Frankie, said :

'You're a good boy. I want you to know how I feel about this.'

'Forget it. There's a ticket in the trousers for that book-maker down by the House. You can collect from him if you got time.'

Madden found the ticket. He stood by the bed like to say something.

Frankie sat up. 'If I supposed to sleep you better let me get on with it, because the way you going on, this is doing me no good at all.'

Madden grinned. Frankie stared back at him, then lay back and turned on to his side, the stitches clear of the pillow.

MADDEN HAD THE light slacked off from his bed and led across the room to hang off a picture of a hay-cart pulled by two horses and the farmer walking alongside of the horses. The way the shade hung it cut the light back from the beds. He was sitting close to the fire and reading a paperback through steel-rimmed spectacles. Outside it was dark.

'How's the time?'

'So you woke up?' Madden got up and went across to the bed. 'How do you feel?'

'Fine - how long I been asleep?'

'A long time. You needed it.'

'I didn't sleep, I just died.' He stretched out. 'What's the book?'

Madden looked at it. 'Can't say I found out. It's *The Castle* by this fellow Kafka. He gets into this village when it's snowing and the fellow who runs the hotel hasn't got a room left but gives him a shake-down in the bar. He

just gets to sleep with all these farmers sitting around drinking when some fellow comes in and says he can't sleep without a permit -'

'I never hear 'bout anything like that before.'

'- the end's not much better. As far as I get it these fellows are having a few beers one night when the landlady comes in dressed like a doll and takes him out to see her wardrobe -'

'I never hear 'bout it called that before either.'

'- we're not talking about that. This is something else. Anyway, after he's seen her wardrobe she says she's got another two upstairs and -'

'I told you she was talking 'bout that?'

'What are you talking about?'

'Her wardrobe.'

'That's got nothing to do with it. Let me finish - so she says that as she's going out to get a new dress in the morning he better come along.'

'That's the end?'

'Sure.'

'Tried the middle?'

'Whoever owned it lost the middle.' Then holding the book up. 'Look. They cut his picture out too. If they hadn't cut his picture out I might have known what he was talking about. You can tell a lot by how a fellow looks.'

'He probably got a reason for it anyhow. You got to have a reason for most things.'

'Sure. He's got to have a reason for it. He just probably says something and means something different.'

'Maybe if you wrote him?'

'Cut it out! - I'll go and get supper. You don't appreciate literature.'

The rain had stopped. There was plenty traffic using the long hill up from the waterfront. Sometimes the glass in the windows would rattle as a heavy motor went by in creeper gear. The sky was clear out above the rooftops and lighted by the moon.

When he had finished eating, Frankie put the tray on the floor, then got up and dressed. Madden looked out the window.

The wind was blowing the high light cloud down off the hills beyond the city and on out to sea. The hill was busy with traffic and bright with lights in the shop windows. Most of the shops had neon signs that blinked into different colours, and a photographer's the lower side of André's had one of a camera and the bulb going off every few seconds, white and very sudden. The lights were bright and many of them.

'There's plenty of lights down there,' said Madden.

Frankie had got a cribbage board and playing cards out a drawer of the dressing-table. 'Yeah. Funny things lights. Want play some cribbage?'

They sat on the beds with the cribbage board between them on a chair. Frankie was a long time in dealing the cards.

'What you thinking about?'

'Lights. Funny things lights.'

'I know what you mean. Here it is the end of August and I look down there and suddenly its Christmas.'

Frankie dealt the cards. 'When I was a kid I'd walk miles in the lights. I'd just walk along looking up at them all shooting in different colours and the windows maybe twice as shiny and I'd never know what I was thinking. I suppose every kid's the same with lights.'

'It was all gas when I was a kid.'

Then after a little :

'Never bother with lights now. One time I see this shop got a sign up front and it Father Christmas with a beard and a sack on his back and when the lights change he was sitting on a sled and when they change again he was grinning down at you with his hand out like he want to shake yours. I must've stood there all night watching him.'

'Sure, all kids are the same,' said Madden.

'Then I went back a couple days later when it's day-

light and there only a tangle of glass tubes and bits of rusty iron on wall. Never felt the same 'bout lights or Father Christmas any more.'

Madden won the game. Frankie put his head back and shut his eyes tight.

'The head bothering you?'

'Going round a little.'

Madden got up. 'I'll make us some coffee. You can have it with a couple of those tablets.'

Suddenly a loud noise came through the wall from the room next door.

'That's the nigger fallen out his bed,' said Madden.

'Don't surprise me any. I stopped one place before that had a nigger next door. Biggest nigger I ever saw and he never worked none either. Only time he got out his sack from the missus was to go collect his money the end the week. His missus was almost as big as he was and she got that on her mind all the time. She got a sister same way too. Sort of run in the family. They had a reunion every Sunday. I used to lay in the sack and listen the bed-springs go. Some reunion they have.'

Well, thought Madden. He can talk all right when he's got something to say. But with himself he don't even scratch the surface. A woman could marry a boy like this and wake one morning twenty years later and wonder who she's sleeping with.

Frankie looked at him. 'I thought you was going make coffee?'

'I'm going now,' Madden said. 'By the way I put the money from Freddy in your pocket. He was asking for you. Somebody had told him all about Weinberger's.'

'That something now. A bookmaker asking for me.' He stood up and stretched himself. 'Never get back to sleep now.'

'You really want to get a good night take a hot bath.' Madden went out into the hall, looked both ways, then kicked the meter box.

'What you do that for?' Frankie says, watching him.

'I fell over it this afternoon and found it worked.' They both laughed.

'There's a packet of epsom in there. Put some in the water and soak a while.'

Frankie looked at him. 'I thought old ladies drank that stuff.'

'Are you doubting me?'

Frankie grinned. 'I'll take your word for it.' He went across and looked out the window. The moon was three-quarters full and bright shining above the city. Up there it seemed very alone; and on the hill the heavy night traffic was all one way from the waterfront.

HE WAS AWAKE early next morning. The big headache was gone and now only the bruises. Madden was still asleep. He got up and dressed, then took a look out the window. It was one of those clear bright mornings with the sky very blue and the sun not yet warm and just above the rooftops. The other side of the hill was in the shade and somebody was taking the wire screen off the photographer's window. He went out to make some coffee. A hard-faced blonde came out the bathroom wearing a faded silk housecoat. She saw him and smiled, and went in the room next door.

When he brought the coffee in Madden was awake and sitting on the edge of the bed with his head bent forward in both hands.

'Something wrong?'

Madden looked up at him slowly, his face the colour of a dirty white sheet. 'I'm all right. I just got up too fast.'

Frankie handed him the coffee. They sat on their beds sipping the hot coffee and not saying anything.



Then after a while Madden said : 'Think I'll go out and get some air. It feels a little closed-in here.'

'I'll come with you,' says Frankie.

The window was already open. He watched Madden pull his trousers on, then took the cups out to the kitchen.

When he came back Madden was lying on his face on the floor by the window. He turned him over and he flopped on his back all loose and limp. He went downstairs in a rush to Jacobs' room. Jacobs came to the door pulling on his trousers.

'Got a phone?' says Frankie.

Jacobs nodded.

Frankie gave him Williams' card. 'Call him and tell him Madden's like dead.'

He left Jacobs blinking his eyes and staring at the card.

When Williams arrived Frankie and Jacobs were in the room with Madden on his bed.

'How long has he been like this?'

'Bout a half hour now,' says Frankie.

'Where's the telephone?'

'I got it in my room,' said Jacobs.

'Well go and call the hospital and tell them to get an ambulance here right away. Tell them Doctor Williams said so.'

'How is he, Doc?' Frankie asked as Jacobs went out. 'He going be okay?'

'Hard to say. He's had a very severe heart attack. It all depends what they can do for him in hospital now.'

Madden lay on the bed like he was dead, and standing there you could not tell whether he breathed or not.

In a little while they heard the clanging of the bell. Williams went downstairs. The clanging of the bell got louder and louder, then stopped suddenly outside. Williams came back up with two blue-uniformed attendants. They loaded the old man on to the canvas stretcher and went downstairs carrying it between them very carefully, Williams and Frankie following them. The nigger and the hard-faced blonde watched from the

top of the stairway. Outside, a nurse stood by the rear of the ambulance and the attendants loaded the stretcher on the rails and ran it aboard. The nurse got inside and fitted an oxygen mask over the old man's face. Williams climbed aboard too, and said out to Frankie: 'There's not any use you coming, boy. They won't let you in. Better if you call them later. They're taking him to All Saints.'

Frankie nodded. An attendant slammed the doors and climbed in front, and before he had the door shut the bell was clanging and the ambulance making a tight turn and driving back down the hill very fast.

SOMEBODY WAS KNOCKING loudly on the door. Before he rolled off the bed it came again.

'Okay, okay!' he says, 'I'm coming.'

They stood outside on the landing, big, tough-looking boys.

'Frankie Gallagher?' said the one wearing the brown derby.

'Yeah,' says Frankie slowly and taking it all in.

'Mr. Scheff wants to see you,' said this one, straight-faced.

'Who's Mr. Scheff when he's at home?' The head going over and the chin coming down.

'Button your lip,' said the other one, straight-faced too, and on the heavy side. They were both heavies, right out the moving-pictures.

'Seeing you know who I am - who are you, Laughing Boy?' Frankie says to the one with the brown derby. That was Frankie all right. Jesus Christ, some Frankie.

'Cut it out,' said the other one. He had his hands in the pockets of his coat and looking very confident.

'Listen you two,' says Frankie. 'I never see you before. I never see this Scheff neither – so tell him there other things I got do.'

Laughing Boy grabbed him by the front of the wind-jammer. Frankie dropped his head and butted him. It sounded like an apple breaking. He had the knee in low down too. Laughing Boy came back off the wall across the hall. Frankie went to meet him with the left to the belly.

'Hold it!' shouted the other one and Frankie was looking at the blue-black Smith and Wesson in his ribs. He stood rock still, hands frozen where they were coming up.

Laughing Boy was on his knees out in middle of the hall.

The door of the next room opened and the nigger put his head out.

'Get your head in, black boy, before it gets blowed off!'

The door slammed shut.

Jesus Christ, thought Frankie. It's the moving-pictures all right. The one with the gun eased back a couple of paces, then motioned with the gun to Laughing Boy. 'Get him on his feet. Over by the wall.'

Frankie hauled him up and stood him on his feet against the wall. Blood was running out his nose and down his chin on to his shirt-front. He shook his head and blood splattered on the floor. Then he put both hands to his nose.

Frankie stood back watching them both.

'You all right, Wouk?'

'What was it?' said Wouk through his hands.

'Was a bus.' Then he took the handkerchief out of his top pocket and threw it to Frankie. 'Wet it.'

In the bathroom was a small frosted-glass window above the sink. He thought about doing one of those spectacular dives through it like in the westerns on television, but on television they are never five floors up.

When he came out, Wouk grabbed the handkerchief

and swung a right-hand. Frankie went back on his heels, the knuckles raising a wind across his face.

'Cut it out, Wouk!' said the one with the gun.

Wouk put the handkerchief to his nose and glared murder at Frankie.

'Downstairs!'

Wouk stepped back.

'You first, Wouk,' the one with the gun said.

Wouk started downstairs, Frankie following, and the one with the gun now in his pocket following them.

They walked across the pavement in the bright sunlight to a cream and green saloon. Wouk opened the rear door.

'You better sit in front,' said the voice over Frankie's shoulder. Wouk gave Frankie that look again, and got in front. He could have blown the roof all right. Frankie got in back with the other one. Behind the wheel was another of the heavy boys and him watching them both in the inside rear-view mirror.

They drove very fast, the traffic heavy on the way down, and them going up-hill to the city. Frankie sat not thinking because it was not very profitable thinking about anything you knew nothing about anyway.

'So you never heard of Mr. Scheff?' said the one alongside him. Frankie did not say anything.

Now they were out from the Island, across the high-arched bridge with the maze of steel girders overhead, and swinging on to a dual-carriageway with long narrow islands with summer flowers bright above the brown earth beds. Either side of the roadway were shops with awnings out over the fronts and the buildings high and clean-looking in the sunlight.

After a time they swung right on to an avenue with trees growing back on the pavements and houses set in their own gardens and more trees growing in the gardens. The trees were tall and almost hid the houses. Then they swung left and drove down a tunnel of trees, the foliage so thick no sunlight came through, and far down the

cool tunnel the sun shone white and hot on the roadway where the trees stopped. They were out in the sunlight and swung left again and up a small rise and along a wide sweep of macadam, tall buildings on the right and overlooking an ornamental garden the other side of the roadway. A number of cars were parked out front of the buildings and people walking on the pavement and in the garden across the way.

They stopped outside the wide-fronted Bruckner Hotel. The doorman in a green and gold uniform opened the door. Frankie got out, the one with him following, and Wouk coming around the front of the motor.

'Inside!' said Wouk.

They went up the steps and through the foyer to the lift. Wouk's nose had stopped bleeding and was swollen flush with his cheek-bones. They rode up in the lift to the top floor. The roof over the hallway was all glass and the sun reflecting brightly through it. The door was at the end of the hallway. Wouk rang the bell. A young nigger wearing a white coat answered the door. He held the door open for them and they waited in the hall while he went to fetch Scheff. It was a very impressive hall. The walls were covered in a heavy embossed paper and gilt figuring on the frescoed ceiling.

The nigger came back followed by Scheff. Scheff was very dark and Jewish-looking, and wearing a grey business suit.

He looked straight at Frankie. 'Ah,' he said, smiling and taking Frankie's hand. 'So you could make it, hey? Good boy, good boy.' He spoke with a great deal of movement and plenty white teeth.

'Nothing else I could do,' says Frankie not much impressed by it all.

'So,' he said, going serious. 'It was like that?' He looked at the two heavies. 'I told you two before you left, I said ask Mr. Gallagher if he will come and see me.' Then he started laughing and gesturing with an unlit cigar at Wouk's face. 'What happened to him, Kline?'

'Was a bus,' said Kline.

Wouk looked sick.

'Go on, get out! Get out!' yelled Scheff.

Kline and Wouk went out with their eyes on the floor.

Afterward: 'You'll forgive these boys, hey, Frankie?' Scheff patting him on the shoulder. 'You know how it is, no upbringing. No manners. Nothing.' He made a clicking sound with his mouth. 'It's sad. Sad.' He shrugged his shoulders. When he shrugged he moved from the waist up. Then smiling again: 'Come on inside, boy. It was nice of you to come, anyway.'

The room was long, opening wide and square the far end. Where it was narrow was a cocktail bar with chrome-legged stools along the front of the fancy counter. The floor was covered by an off-white furry-like carpet. On the walls was a mauve tapestry-work paper, and the ceiling a brilliant white. Hung on the walls was a series of huge paintings of black gnarled trees reaching into an orange sunset.

Scheff stopped at the bar. 'Like it?' he said, watching Frankie's face.

'You might say it's better than my place.'

Scheff put his head back and laughed. 'I like that. You're some boy, heh? Some boy.' Frankie sat on one of the stools. Scheff was behind the counter. He was not tall, but well-built and not bad-looking. You know, sort of teddy bear-like. He wore jewellery too, and the hair growing black from his fingers back over his hands.

'What will you have to drink, Frankie?'

'Whisky. Seeing it's free.'

Scheff started with a giggle at that, and the more he saw it the louder it got till all of him shook.

'I like you, boy. You're outright. You speak your mind. Too many people have something to hide these days. Sure I like you, Frankie boy.' He playfully punched him on the shoulder.

He had large whiskies on ice in tall glasses. He raised his, 'Here's to you, boy. Your success!'

They both drank. The whisky was smooth and very cold.

'What you want see me 'bout, Mr. Scheff?'

Scheff smiled and came around the counter.

Jesus, thought Frankie, there plenty Laughing Boys around today.

'I heard about you fixing Griffon good yesterday. You do all right, heh?'

Frankie swilled his drink around.

'Have you been around the fight business long?'

'Not till yesterday,' says Frankie.

'You make a joke?' said Scheff, smiling. 'That's not what I heard, and my information is reliable. Someone just doesn't happen along and flatten Griffon.'

'I used to be a bouncer in a dance-hall,' says Frankie, grinning.

Scheff watched him closely. 'You work on the water-front?'

'I just got in town a few days ago.'

'You've got no manager, nothing?'

'Nothing. A big round nothing, mister.'

'All right. Let me put it this way. If you had the chance to make something in the fight business, would you take it?'

'I don't know. I never thought 'bout it,' says Frankie wondering where it's all leading.

'If I told you I was prepared to put you on the way. What would you say?'

Frankie smiled. 'What makes you think I'm any good? I don't even know how to box.'

'Don't worry about that. That's got nothing to do with what I said.'

'Okay. If I did, what good am I going do you?'

Scheff laughed, still clenching the unlit cigar in his left hand. 'Listen, boy. Nat's no crook. I'm not taking you for a ride - I'll tell you. Some people own race ponies. Some own yachts. Others play stocks and shares. All I want is to be associated with the fight business. I can

afford it. Make no mistake. News gets around. By now every small-time fight manager and touch-artist in the business will be after you – you don't want that. That's all wrong. That's not for you. I'm sorry about those two, but I sent them along before the wrong people got there. If you really want to go somewhere in this business, let me fix it. I have the means. Everything's paid for.' When he finished talking he refilled the glasses. Frankie could not think straight. He sat looking at his glass and not saying anything.

In a little while Scheff said : 'Well, what do you say, Frankie?'

'I don't know.'

Scheff slapped him on the back in that big-hearted way of his. 'I'll tell you what. If I get my lawyer to draw up a contract this afternoon you can come around to the club tonight and we'll go over it. If it suits you –'

He left it at that.

Frankie got up. 'How do I find this place?'

'Club Ecuador. It's up-town here. You'll find it.'

She came in wearing a light summer dress, duster coat over her arm, and very beautiful.

'Oh. I'm awfully sorry,' she said.

'That's all right, Helen,' said Scheff. 'I believe you two have met anyway.' Then to Frankie. 'It used to be Griffon – now it's Gallagher. I'm going to buy her a share in Weinbergers.'

'Nate!' she said, trying to look hurt. Then giving her hand to Frankie, 'I'm delighted to meet you. You certainly did the unexpected.'

Her hand was soft and cool, and he felt those violet eyes right the way through him.

'How is your eye?' she went on.

'Yeah. Yeah, fine.'

She was smiling, a forefinger to her mouth and very feminine. The dress was cut low and the skin very smooth and clear and the cleavage sharp and deep.

'You won't forget about tonight?' Scheff asked.



'Yeah, sure. I remember.'

'Goodbye,' said the girl.

'Sure,' says Frankie.

In the hall Scheff put some folded money in his hand.

'That's for any trouble those two caused this morning.'

'That's okay. I get in trouble all the time.'

Scheff smiled. 'Keep it. And remember, Frankie. There's plenty more if you want to make it.'

Out in the hallway he put the money in his pocket and walked to the lift, still smelling the perfume and feeling her eyes on him. In the lift were two rows of buttons and a red and green light. He pushed a button, and nothing happened. He pushed another, and again nothing happened. Then he looked carefully at the floor, the roof, the doors, and got out and walked downstairs. That was Frankie all right. Jesus Christ, some Frankie.

'SURE I HEARD about this kid. So he flattened Griffon? So maybe it was a lucky one. The way I heard it it was more like a vaudeville act than a fight.'

'That's not what I heard,' said Scheff. 'Bollinger and Karwan didn't say anything like that.'

'You know how it is when some slugger comes along - everybody raves about him. One lucky punch and everybody says, This Is It.'

'Well I want you to do me the favour, Wally.'

'What about O'Dowd? O'Dowd could handle him for you.'

'He's got enough to do with Volek.'

'He could handle them both.'

'Look, Wally. How far I have got in life is because I use this,' said Scheff, tapping his forehead. 'I never believe in

letting the right hand know what the left is doing. When I heard about this boy I did some thinking. Maybe I'm right in what I think. Maybe I'm wrong – but I do think, Wally. That's the thing – I think.'

'What about Madden?' asked Wally Lang. 'Isn't he in this somewhere?'

'As far as anyone knows he just met Madden in some doss-house.'

'I don't know, Nat. I like to find them myself. I never even set eyes on this kid.'

'I tell you he's all right. He's a good boy. All you have to do is put him through the business till we see how he shapes. If he doesn't fit in one way he may fit in another. You don't lose anything by it.'

'Okay, Nat. It's you that's paying it,' Lang said, getting up from the divan. 'But I want you to know I'm not sold on it.'

Scheff got up from his desk. 'Wait till you see him. He's got arms and shoulders like a heavyweight. He's something, I tell you. Now go on out and forget about it. I'll tell you when he'll be in at Goldman's.'

Lang nodded, put his hat on and went out. Scheff went across and poured himself a drink at the bar in the alcove by the window. He brought the drink back to the divan, then lit a cigar.

The walls of the office were panelled and concealed lighting reflecting on the low white ceiling. The floor was heavily carpeted, and behind the big polished desk was an oil painting of a fast fought out finish at some race-track; the bright-clad jockeys flat on the horses' necks and the horses with their heads out and their ears back.

The telephone rang. He let it ring a respectable time, then got up and answered it: 'Scheff speaking. Yes. Yes, I'll be down tonight, Snyder. And it's Shultz? – yes. Good – and you'll see Volek's percentage is on the right side? – good. Then I'll see you late tonight.'

He went back to the divan. The whisky was excellent.

He was very particular about his whisky. Nathan Scheff was very particular about everything. He sat on the divan sipping whisky, smoking the cigar, and absent-mindedly looking around the office. The walls were hung with pictures of fighters squaring up to the camera, and pictures of girl dancers and singers, and girls whose pictures did not quite reveal what they did. His eyes went back to the oil painting, and he sat there feeling the wind roaring past him and hearing the pounding hooves and smelling the horses: and somebody knocked on the door.

The girl came in: 'What's wrong? Lost your voice?'

He got up. 'No - no, I was thinking.'

'Something important?'

'Not so important as you. Come here.'

He watched her walk to him. She wore a tight white evening gown sewn with sequins. When she walked all of her moved. She stopped some way from him, her head high, smiling with her eyes.

'Come here.'

She smiled with her mouth.

He reached out, filling his hand with her hair, drawing it down, her head going back and her against him. He kissed her.

He let her push him off.

'My face. I have a show to do, remember?'

'Sit down.'

She glanced at the low divan, then smoothed her gown.

'Go on,' he said, 'it won't crease.'

She laughed. They both laughed. She sat down, the gown tight and her knees together. He put an arm around her shoulders and drew her to him. She put both hands to his chest and held herself away.

'No, Nate. Really. I can't go out there with my face roughed up.'

'All right. All right,' he said. He put his hand on her knees.

She smiled. 'Impossible, darling.'

'Don't be so smug.' He brought his hand to the front of her gown.

'My favourite octopus.'

'Must you talk?' he said, kissing her softly on the cheek, then bringing his lips gently down the long smooth curve of her neck. She put her head back on the divan, trembling slightly.

'The zip,' she said.

He found the zip and the front of the gown came away. Her breasts reached out. She had remarkable breasts, huge, up-tilted, with prodigious brown nipples. She brought his hands together and to her breasts, then her hands on his. She dropped her eyes, not looking at him, watching.

'No,' she said.

'Damn the dress.'

She pulled away and sat up.

'I'll have to go, Nate. Really.' She stood up and smoothed the gown down over her hips.

He stood up and put his hands on her shoulders, her skin smooth, warm and soft. He kissed her on the mouth. Her lips were hot and tasting faintly of orange blossom. He brought her close, feeling all of her against him.

'I must go, Nate,' she said, her lips wetly shining.

He bent over the coffee table in front of the divan and stubbed out the smouldering cigar. She fitted the front of the gown over her breasts.

'Do me the favour.' Her voice was soft.

He smiled. 'Anytime.'

She turned around. He opened the back of the gown wide and kissed her shoulder. All of her smelled faintly of orange blossom.

'Please,' she said.

He zipped the gown. She turned around and put her finger under his chin.

'Be good, Nate.'

'I'm always good, aren't I?'

'Ho!'

'Ho! - be good yourself.'

'I'm always good.'

'I won't go into that. By the way, you'll have to get someone drive you back to the hotel when you're through. I have to go away tonight. I have to see Snyder. I won't be back till tomorrow.'

'Who's Snyder?'

'He's a matchmaker. I have to be there for Volek.'

'You certainly take an interest in that lumbering polak.'

'He's going to be the next middleweight champion. That's what.'

'I was going home tonight anyway' She said it in a way that made him want to take hold of her and begin again.

'What's wrong with my place so suddenly?'

'I like to go home once in a while.' She went across to the door, him following. 'Besides, it's not good for you.' He slapped her across the hips.

'Good-night, Helen.'

'Good-night.' She kissed him lightly on the chin.

WHEN FRANKIE ARRIVED at the Club Ecuador it was around ten o'clock. The club had a wide glass front and a green-carpeted foyer decorated with exotic plants and shrubs beautifully shaded with soft coloured lights. Discreetly to one side of the foyer was a card on an easel that said: Helen Guerrero with the Florentine Dorrell Latin-American Orchestra. Across the half-circle canopy above the entrance, CLUB ECUADOR flashed in simple white neon.

Frankie looked in at the lighted foliage, then at the sign. 'What do you want?' The doorman came down the steps wearing a scarlet uniform.

'I come see Mr. Scheff.'

The doorman took it all in; Frankie with his hands in the pockets of the windjammer and the taped down gauze over his eye. 'Of course you know Mr. Scheff personal like,' the doorman said, playing it along.

'Yeah. Yeah, that right,' says Frankie. 'Personal like.'

'You have a card I suppose?'

'I not a union man,' says Frankie, and thinking this long fellow was thinking he was bright because he was doorman at the Ecuador.

'Beat it!'

'You go tell Mr. Scheff Mr. Gallagher come see him,' Frankie says, still with the hands in the pockets, but the head going over and down.

'Having trouble, George?' said Gessler out on the pavement, grinning wide.

'You know him, Mr. Gessler?'

'Slightly. What do you want, Frankie?'

'Mr. Scheff tell me see him tonight.'

'Better call him, George,' said Gessler.

George looked at Frankie, then at Gessler. 'Yes, sir.' George went inside.

'Going to rain tonight,' said Gessler. 'Can feel it in the wind.'

It was a cool wind and eddied dust along the pavement. Across the street was the high, modern Belvidere Hotel with trees in long narrow gardens either side of the entrance. The gardens were flood-lit and the trees very green and a fountain between the gardens spouting water clear and cold-looking in the bright light. The street was very busy with car-traffic. At that time of night, most of the taxis driving with the 'For Hire' flag out.

When George came back a taxi stopped and he went on across the pavement and opened the door. A tall blonde girl got out wearing a blue evening gown and a

stole across her shoulders. She was followed by a dark, oriental-looking girl equally as tall and wearing a red evening gown and a fur cape. They stood very elegantly together while a short, grey-haired man wearing an evening suit paid the driver, then tipped George as he followed the girls inside. George said his thanks and put the money in his pocket without even looking at it like maybe it was below his dignity to find out how much it was. Frankie wondered how much could be made opening doors for old men and young girls.

'Mr. Brookham. City editor,' said Gessler.

'Some dolls,' Frankie says, and thinking it odds-on Mr. Brookham never kissed either of the girls standing up. Else he was a navel-kisser. He was some thinker, this Frankie.

'This way, Mr. Gallagher,' said George.

Frankie and Gessler followed George inside. Gessler went down into the club. Inside on the dance-floor couples were dancing and others sitting at the tables. The only light came from candles on the tables, and the lights over the bar and the orchestra. The orchestra played something soft and Latin.

'This way, sir.' They went past the doors down to the club and up a carpeted stairway, the upper part of the walls completely mirrored and a cut-glass chandelier at the top of the stairway. George coming behind was looking at the widest shoulders he ever saw.

Inside the office it was warm and smelled of cigar smoke and faintly of orange blossom.

Scheff got up and shook hands. 'Good to see you, boy. I was hoping you would be here shortly. I've had to arrange to go away tonight and I didn't want to miss you - sit down. It's all yours.'

Frankie sat down uneasily on the divan. Scheff brought him a drink, then sat on the edge of the desk.

'Well, have you made up your mind?'

Frankie looked up at him. 'Mr. Scheff, you ever heard of Joe Madden?'

Scheff considered it. 'No. Why do you ask?'

'I thought maybe he was something in the fight game.'

'I've never heard of any Joe Madden. I know a great many people but I've never even heard the name before. Of course, there's plenty of bums and hangers-on in this business.'

'Well then, Mr. Scheff,' says Frankie, 'If you think I can be a fighter I'll give it a try. I don't know nothing fancy but there was never anything beat me. Only thing ever beat me was working at some job you never get any place. That's the only thing ever beat me, Mr. Scheff.'

'Good. That's good. I thought you would see it that way - I think there's a great future ahead of you. I think you'll do great things.' He paused, smiling, then went on, 'Have you ever heard of Wally Lang, Frankie?'

'Yeah. That's a long time ago, though. I must've been a kid then. He was pretty big if I remember right.'

'He was,' said Scheff, 'and he still is. But you know how it is with trainers and managers, unless they can find the right boys all the time people forget them.' Then confidentially, 'I had a word with Mr. Lang about you and he's keen to give you a try-out.'

'He thinks I'm good enough to give me a chance?' says Frankie, unbelieving.

Scheff smiled. 'That's what he said. He was here about an hour ago. He said if you wanted you could be at Goldman's the beginning of the week.'

'He said that?'

'That's right,' said Scheff. 'I have the contract here on my desk if you want to sign. It's the usual contract, all straight and above. You could take it to anyone for legal advice and they would agree. There's also something in it for you right now on signing. What do you say?'

'What if Mr. Lang don't think I'm any good?'

'Then that's my loss. But I don't think he will by what I've heard.'

Frankie thought about it, then after a little: 'Okay, Mr. Scheff. I'll sign.'



'Good - then if you'll excuse me a moment I'll get someone witness it and then it will all be perfectly legal.'

Scheff came back with a dapper little man in an evening suit and wearing thick-lensed spectacles.

'This is Mr. Kruft, my accountant.'

Kruft nodded. Scheff spread the typewritten contract and the copy on the desk, then Frankie scrawled his signature across the bottom of them, followed by Scheff, then Kruft.

After signing, Kruft left. Scheff swung the oil painting away from the wall, opened the safe, counted out some money, then gave it to Frankie. 'There,' he said, 'how does that feel? From now on you get paid regular. If there's anything you want, or anything troubles you, come and see me. All right?'

'That's plenty money,' says Frankie, looking at it.

'I think there will be plenty more before long,' said Scheff, smiling, 'now if you'd be kind enough to excuse my rudeness, I'll have to be going now.'

'Thanks very much, Mr. Scheff.' Frankie put the money away. Scheff shook hands and gave him the copy of the contract.

'Don't forget to be at Goldman's.'

'I don't forget anything, Mr. Scheff,' says Frankie, going out the door.

'HELLO,' SAID THE girl when he reached the bottom of the stairway. He smiled.

'How did it all go?' she asked.

'Oh, yeah. Yeah it go all right. Mr. Lang going give me a try-out,' says Frankie, embarrassed by the way she looked at him.

'Is that good?' She smiled brightly, 'about Mr. Lang I mean.'

'Yeah. Everybody hear 'bout Mr. Lang,' says Frankie, and somehow him talking and not hearing himself.

'So now you're a professional.' She said it with some admiration.

'Yeah. Yeah, professional.'

Her eyes moved over his face and him confused and unconsciously raising his hand to the dressing over his eye. She never thought a man's neck could be so beautiful. He was beautiful. Beautiful all over. Men are not beautiful. Yes they are. He is beautiful.

'We should celebrate,' she said, taking his arm.

The gown was cut low and he didn't want to look at her, and he did want to look at her, and he could not look in her eyes anyway.

She walked him to the door down to the club.

'I can't go in there,' he said.

'Of course you can - you will.'

The maître d'hôtel opened the door. He was one of those over-mannered boys with long eyelashes and smoothed down hair.

'Mr. Scheff's table, Ramon,' said the girl.

The boy bowed, then escorted them through the tables.

'Look at me,' said the girl. 'You're with me.'

The table was screened by much green foliage. Frankie sat facing the girl and with his back to the dancers. The boy took the order himself from the girl.

She smiled brightly at him again. 'How often will you fight?'

'I don't know,' says Frankie, not sure of himself or the girl nor of all the green foliage drooping around them.

'I must see you fight. I'll sit below your corner at the ringside. Will you mind?'

'I don't know,' says Frankie, feeling clumsy just sat there and with her looking at him that way and smiling. She wore her hair down on her smooth white shoulders. Her hair was wine-dark and reflected the candle-

light. He watched the flame of the candle burn. 'Look at me,' she said.

The music had finished and the dancers were leaving the floor.

'Look at me, Frankie.' She reached out her hand. Her hand was soft and warm and very lightly on his. Her eyes were no longer violet but very dark and the candle-light in them.

'Say something, Frankie,' she said, her voice soft and her lips wetly shiny. The boy came back with a bottle of Perrier-Jouët.

The girl told him to open it, then waved him away without once taking her eyes from Frankie. They sat quietly and not saying anything, and Frankie was glad when the music began. They sat that way, then suddenly she gripped his hand tightly, and said: 'You're an awfully nice boy.'

He looked at the tablecloth.

'Hello, Helen - Frankie,' said Gessler, standing by the table.

She took her hand from Frankie's. 'Hello, Harry.'

'You sounded real well tonight,' said Gessler.

'Thank you. There's no need to wait for the next show. There's no late show tonight.'

'Isn't she nice, Frankie?' Then to the girl. 'He's a one. Don't forget it.'

'I won't,' she said, getting up. 'Excuse us.'

Gessler watched her take Frankie's arm and lead him through the dancers around the edge of the floor.

In the foyer she collected her wrap and sent George for her car. While they waited she stood close to him, and him wondering what was happening, and looking out through the wide front to the fountain under the green trees in the flood-lights around the front of the Belvidere Hotel.

George came in and they went out to the car. The wind had an edge to it now and she held the wrap tightly around her.

'I think I'll go on down the hill now,' says Frankie. 'And let me go home alone?' she pouted, very beautiful with the wind in her hair. 'You must take me home.'

Frankie looked at his feet.

'Come. Please?' she said, looking at him and not smiling; and very beautiful with the wind in her hair and not smiling.

He very slowly lifted his head, looked at her, looked past her up the street, then looked at George looking out at them. He walked around front of the motor and got in when she opened the door. The motor was running and the heater warming the inside of the car. The gown was tucked up around her hips so she could work the pedals. She glanced at her knees, then smiling, said: 'Actually I should have changed before we left.' She swung the car out on to the roadway.

They drove across town. She handled the car well. He felt easier with her in the near dark. The moon was out and the traffic very light. He saw on the dashboard clock it was ten minutes to midnight. He settled back and it was pleasant being driven in the night with the moon out and the buildings sharp and clean in the moonlight and the trees dark along the streets and moving with the wind.

THE ENTRANCE HALL was high, painted in pastel colours, and the floor was polished grey marble. No one was about and she went across and brought the lift down from the twelfth floor. When she walked the high heels sounded sharply loud on the polished marble.

'You'll be okay now,' says Frankie as they waited for the lift.

She looked at him with those eyes now violet again in

the lighting. 'I thought fighters were brave?' she said.

Frankie looked around the hall.

They went up in the lift.

The flat was on the fifteenth floor. She opened the door and put the light on. Just inside was a dividing partition of glass shelves and on the shelves an amazing array of coloured wine glasses all drooping at various angles as if in a giant oven and very slowly melting.

'A little weird, aren't they?' she said.

'Yeah. That puts it light,' says Frankie from the doorway.

'Come in,' she said, and smiling very brightly again.

He could not hear himself walk on the scarlet carpeting.

'You'll find a drink in that cabinet.' She pointed over by the huge, blue quilted divan.

He watched her climb the stairway the other side of the room. The night was shut out by heavy velvet curtains.

So all right, he was thinking. So after today there really people live in places like this and not only in the moving-pictures. Or maybe, he was thinking, they are all out the moving-pictures.

He sat on the huge divan in front of the curtained window. Scattered along the divan were gold embroidered cushions, and the same cushions on the deep easy sitting chairs. The stuccoed walls and ceiling were a startling white, and the walls hung with black-framed pictures. The only lights burning were on the walls inside the door, and the array of wine-glasses reflected the lights and shone and sparkled brilliantly.

'Didn't you get a drink?'

He watched her cross to the cocktail cabinet. She wore a blue quilted housecoat trimmed with white silk around the collar and cuffs. She brought the drinks and sat by him on the divan. He moved away a little.

She turned smiling. 'I believe you're frightened of me.'

'No', he says, 'I - eh - '

'You're a strange boy,' she said, looking at him.

He sipped his drink. The whisky was neat.

She crossed her legs. Under the housecoat she wore tight blue toreador pants. The pants were embroidered down the legs with silver. 'I don't know what it is. You're so different. You're so capable – yet you seem so unsure of yourself,' she went on.

He wished she would stop talking. He tried the whisky again, feeling it raw and burning his throat. Now she waited for him.

'I do okay,' he said, finally.

'I think you could do better,' she said, half turned toward him on the divan. He was looking into his glass. The glass made his fingers appear large inside of the drink. She reached her hand to his arm, very lightly. 'You're not listening to me.'

'Sure – sure,' he said, still looking into the glass.

'Look at me,' she said. She took his glass and set it along with hers on the side table. Then she stood in front of him. He raised his head. She reached out her hand. He took it, standing up, her close to him and looking at him that way.

'Frankie.' Their faces almost touching. 'Frankie.' Her voice not a whisper. She was close to him and smelling faintly of orange blossom. Her lips touched his cheek, close against him, her hands going around his neck. She lifted her face to him. He kissed her, his hands on her arms and her feeling each finger strongly through the housecoat.

'Oh, Frankie,' she said, trying to bury herself against him. 'Hold me tightly. Kiss me. Kiss me. Please.'

He kissed her, her arms around his neck and holding herself to him.

'Frankie. Oh, Frankie, I love you.' The words spoken against his mouth. 'This is going to be so wonderful together. Hear me, darling? Oh, darling!'

He could hear his heart beating up in his head. His mouth was dry.

'Love me, darling. Please! – You do want me?' Her eyes looked all the way into him. She moved slightly away, the housecoat coming open at the front and her naked to the waist.

His hands still on her arms he looked down at her, and her shaking and that tight choked feeling in her chest and a roaring in her head as maybe the ocean on a wild shore in a big wind.

He did not say anything, and finally, he let go of her and walked to the door. She stood looking after him, unable to move. It hurt so much she could not even cry out with the pain. Now he had gone, and the door was open to the hallway.

THERE WERE NO lights and she lay face-down on the divan and cried. She cried very bitterly. The crying lasted a long time. After the crying came the loud wracking sobs. It was very sad, a woman crying that way in the dark. Afterward it was quiet and only a clock ticking somewhere in the big darkness.

Frankie. Oh, Frankie. The words silent and deep in herself. I love you. I know I love you. Oh, darling Frankie. I know it. Truly. Love me, Frankie. Please love me. Why don't you love me? Please love me. Please dear God let him love me. Oh, God, please. Oh, Frankie. Love me. I love you. Please love me like I love you. I won't be with anyone ever again. Believe me, darling. Believe me God. I won't. I swear I couldn't help it. You know I couldn't help it. You know how it is God. You do, don't you? Please say you do. I'll do anything you want if you make him love me. I won't be with anyone else, ever. I won't

do those other things either anymore. Please God. You can have all this back too. Really you can. I don't want anything but him. Please let me have him. Let me have him and you can take all this away. I don't want anything but him. I don't, really I don't. Just let me have him. Always. Please, dear God. Do you think he might love me just a little? I'm not bad really. Please tell me I'm not bad. Tell me, please. I'm not bad. It's just the way I am. You made me this way. You make everyone. Of course you do. It would be foolish if you said you didn't. You know you do. You must help me after making me this way. It's your fault. I didn't ask to be made this way. You did it. Why was it me? Why can't it be just one? Other women only have one. Why can't I? Why can't I have him? It would work with him. I know it would. I can feel it. I could do everything just with him. Believe me God. You do believe me? Please let me have him. Please make him love me. Please—please—please—please. I love him. I love you, Frankie. Do you hear me, darling? I love you. When you see me next time don't be afraid. Do you hear me, darling? Sweet, sweet, darling. Just hold me tight and tell me you love me. That's how I want it. We could go away just the two of us and never see anyone again. Please, darling? Sweet one. I know you love me. Thank you, darling sweet one. I do know that now. Tell me again. Please? I'll tell you. I love you.

The words silent and deep in herself and only the sound of a clock faintly in the big darkness.

IT WAS COLD outside and dark now with the moon hidden by thickening cloud. At a distance he saw a red neon



sign brightly in the darkness above the other buildings, and he remembered passing the hotel shortly after leaving the Ecuador. The sign was a long way away and afterward it would be quite a walk from the Ecuador to the Island. He walked along in the dark with the wind in his face and saw everywhere the girl. He tried not to think about her. It was going to rain. Better to think about the rain. You could not think about girls like her. Those kind of girls had everything they wanted. And the way she talked. She talked like one of those dolls out the moving-pictures who are all empty inside and the talk coming out of them that way and meaning nothing at all. They probably just passed the time that way. So it was better not to think about those girls. She was something though. All right, so she was something?

He went on walking and trying not to see her anymore. It was not so cold when he had been walking a while. Most of the lights in the houses were out now. There were trees growing on the pavements. All that part of town had trees growing on the pavements. Trees grew in the gardens of the houses too. The trees moved in the wind. It was a cold wind and it blew across the lonely city in the night from the north west. He thought very hard about the rain but he still saw her there in the darkness, and after a little while it began to rain; and there was no use thinking about the rain anymore.

GOLDMAN'S GYM WAS on Wendell Street. Around on the main thoroughfare was the imposing front of Katzmer's Restaurant, the long, shiny plate-glass windows hung with scalloped nylon so that in daytime you saw nothing, but in the evening with the chandeliers lit you could see

the diners at the tables among the palms and gilt-framed mirrors on the back wall. No matter how many times you passed on the pavement you never saw a waiter anywhere near a table and you got to thinking they were maybe hidden behind the palms. Around on Wendell Street they set out the swill-bins and early in the morning bums would come up from the Island to eat at Katzmer's.

Across the street was Goldman's. Out front it looked like an old bar, the wide windows either side of the swing-doors half boarded-up on the inside and the glass grey with dirt. Outside was a crowd standing around the doors reading the morning race-papers; and in the afternoons waiting for the results; and in the evenings when the doors were bolted and the place closed, a number of them still stood around for no apparent reason whatsoever.

The gym was high and went a long way back, and was gloomy and smoky. High in the ceiling were the bare lights under dirty, white-glass shades. It was the same as all gyms, smoke-filled, sour-smelling, and smelling harshly of rubbing-liniment and sweat. The noise was always the same too, loud-voiced, the thud of leather, the scuff of fight shoes, heavy breathing, and the light quick patter of skip ropes.

'Gallagher?' asked the one wearing the brown suit with a green scarf around his neck and the ends tucked inside the coat.

Frankie set his bag down. 'That's right,' he says.

'My name's Lang.' Lang had a long, pinched face, grey-looking, and his eyes yellowed and red-rimmed like maybe he been up all night. 'Got any gear with you?' Lang went on, then looking around the gym and nodding to somebody.

Frankie picked up his bag.

'Okay,' said Lang. 'You can strip off. We'll have a light work-out.' He went across to talk to two men just come in. He was narrow-backed and sad-looking as well as grey.

Frankie went back to the dressing-room, the grand, fine feeling in him fallen a little. A nigger was lying on the rubbing-table with a white towel over him and the rubber working on his legs. Neither of them looked at him as he put his bag on the bench and began to undress. He was lacing up the high shoes when two fighters came in wearing gym-clothes and towelling hoods over their heads. They sat on the bench, both sweating plenty.

'So it's Saturday night, I tells her?' The taller of the two said. 'To hell with your fight game, she says. I'm going out just the same. All right, I says, so you're going out? So what? Then what you think, Sammy? She says it's a good thing they don't put me on television or I'm going to make an arse out myself getting flattened in front of ten million people.'

'She said that?' said Sammy, 'and what you say then?'

'I don't say anything. I just give her a back-hand. That shut her up all right.'

'That's it,' said Sammy, 'too true, that's it.'

The tall one watched Frankie lace his shoes. 'You new here, kiddo?' he asked. Frankie nodded. They both sweated plenty.

'Say,' said Sammy. 'Won't it you put the kibosh on Griffon?'

'Him!' said the tall one. 'He flattened Griffon? What you giving me?'

'That's true. I was there. Isn't that true, kid?'

'Well you might say that,' says Frankie.

'Who's looking after you?' The tall one taking off the hood, said.

'Lang,' says Frankie, finished lacing and pulling a sweater over his head.

'What do you know?' said Sammy. 'Wally the Card-sharp.' The tall one pulled a face.

Out in the gym Lang watched two niggers working in the ring, wearing headgear, taking it easy, circling lazily, working open-gloved and their shoes scuffing the canvas.

Lang saw him. 'How do you feel?' he asked.

'Okay, Mr. Lang.'

'Take the sweater off.'

Frankie took off the sweater, Lang noting the muscle action.

'Raise both arms over your head. Now sideways. Right back. Now out front. Swell. How about that eye?'

'Okay,' says Frankie. 'I got see Doc Williams 'bout it later.'

'Let me see it.' Lang eased the adhesive off the forehead. The wound was a clean-cut red line, the black cat-gut stitches small and neat. 'He's done a good job. The only one who can touch Williams at needlework is Cuba McQueen. Cuba's a great cut-man. You cut easy?'

'First time I was cut,' Frankie says.

'You got it all right,' said Lang, throwing the gauze under the ring. 'Better leave it open let the air get to it.' Lang didn't talk so off-hand now.

'What you want me do?' says Frankie.

'We'll just take it easy for a couple of weeks till you find your way. Okay?'

'Anything you say, Mr. Lang.'

The rest of the morning Lang had Frankie work out on the mats and exercise with the medicine ball. Afterward, he skipped some rope. All the while Lang watched him closely. Frankie swung and crossed, swung and crossed, and crossed behind his back, up on the balls of his feet, dancing, Lang watching it, impressed.

'Okay. Kill it.' He said after a time. He caught the rope and put it back on the hook. Frankie kept moving, rotating his arms and shoulders.

'Walk around a couple more minutes, then cool off and take a shower. We start every morning like that, then build it slowly.' Lang sounded happier with himself.

When Frankie came out the dressing-room, Lang was waiting for him. They went and sat down at the counter of the tea-bar by the door. The counter was littered with ash-trays and morning newspapers.

'Two teas, Harry,' called Lang. 'One with fruit.'

'Yes, sir. One with fruit,' said the counter-man.

The tea came in heavy china mugs, Frankie's with lemon. Lang lit a cigarette, letting the smoke drift out his open mouth. 'Smoke?' he asked.

Frankie shook his head.

'Good. Filthy habit. Never smoked myself till I began to worry. Worried since I was fifteen. Drink?'

'Sometimes,' says Frankie.

'Well I would cut it for a while. It won't do you any harm.' They drank some tea, Lang smoking and thinking.

'How about your weight?'

'One hundred and sixty last time I was weighed,' says Frankie.

'Tomorrow you go on the scales before we start, then again after you shower. We do that every day till I see how it goes. The other thing is you better give me your address.'

Frankie gave it to him. They drank the tea and watched two heavyweights working the ring. Then these three fellows came in from the street, the big one first, blue-suited and carrying a small suit-case. The fighter followed him in, his face pretty well marked, maybe in his early thirties, wide-shouldered, and his brown hair cut close to the sides of his head. He carried a big travel-bag and waited for the other one. The short one had a serious-looking face, white-haired, and wearing a well-cut grey suit. All three were dressers.

'Louis Hennig,' said Lang.

'Yeah. I once see his picture,' says Frankie.

'If he's going to make the title he's going to have to do it soon. Must be getting near time for the other side of the hill.'

'Who the other two?'

'The little one's Dryer, his manager. The other's Malone.'

The three were going toward the dressing-room, some of the people around the ring calling to them as they went by. Everybody knew Hennig.

‘Well, we’ll sling it for today,’ said Lang, getting down off his stool. Frankie followed him out.

‘Which way are going?’ asked Lang.

‘The Island.’

‘Then I’ll see you tomorrow. Have an early night.’

‘I do that, Mr. Lang,’ said the professional, then walking toward the hill, happy with himself.

HE STOPPED IN at the Kosher Restaurant to eat. After eating he went down to O’Rourke’s Sports Emporium and bought a pair of black woollen tights, a towelling hood and two sweat shirts. It was pleasant walking on the hill in the late summer sun. The sky was clear but not the blue in it of mid-summer. The wind had eased with the rain during the night and now it was a warm breeze and the freshness not yet lost in the city. In another month summer would be gone. There is something sad about late summer, the blue fading from the sky the way it does, and the sun lower and losing its warmth, and no longer the birds outside early in the morning : and out walking one day you find summer is suddenly gone and soon will come the rain and snow and the wind from the north. You do not think about autumn. You only remember autumn. You remember the yellow and brown-curved leaves and the grass tipped with white frost, and it all very grand in the late golden sunlight through the bare trees. But think too deeply about autumn and you think about dying.

He crossed the roadway, the bag in his left hand, walking easily, not in any hurry.

‘Frankie!’ The voice called. ‘Frankie!’ A little louder

this time. She looked back out the front window of the parked car.

She waved and called : 'Hello.' And smiling and very charming.

He went back, slowly. Then thinking he better say something, says, 'What you doing way down here?'

She was smiling, and raised her eyebrows. Her hair was done up on top bouffant style.

'I thought I might take you to lunch.'

'You take me? I always thought men took women to lunch - besides, I just ate.'

Her eyes kept returning to the neat row of little black stitches over his eye. 'Where did you eat?'

'The Kosher,' says Frankie nodding back up the hill.

'I didn't know you were Jewish.'

'I'm not Jewish - you thinking it's only chinks maybe eat in a chink place?' Her eyes never left his face. 'I believe that's the most I've ever heard you say. You must do it more often.'

'Eat well,' says Frankie, walking away.

She got out of the car and went after him.

'Please forgive me,' she said, looking into his eyes, her face sincere. 'I didn't mean to say that - I mean I did - but - I didn't mean you to take offence.'

'I'm never bugged. I'm just thinking you got the wrong boy.'

'No. Please, Frankie. Listen to me. I want to talk to you.'

'Okay. Go ahead.' He stopped walking.

'Well,' she said, glancing around the busy pavement, 'it's not very easy here -- I know a nice quiet place where we can have a drink.'

'Don't drink no more. Mr. Lang tell me cut the booze.'

She looked at him, her face serious, and her eyes seeming to have changed depth and now bottomless. 'You're not very helpful, are you, Frankie?'

He looked at her, and seeing her that way was suddenly

very brave with this beautiful girl. 'Okay, I'll tell you. You bug me. That's why. All right?'

He moved her. He moved her deeply. Everything he did and said and the way he looked moved her very deeply.

'Frankie,' she said very sweetly. 'You've eaten. You don't drink anymore. Do you think I might drive you around while we talk? It's not very private here.'

'I can't. I got go see Doc Williams get the sewing out,' he says, and trying not to feel anything the way she looked at him.

'Can I drive you there?' She was hurt and very sad.

'It in't far. It's only down the hill some place.'

'Please?'

'You don't have to.'

She put both hands on his arm, then they turned and went back to the car.

Sitting in the car, she said : 'Do you have the address?'

'Yeah. Yeah, here it is.' He gave her the card.

She swung the car around and drove down the hill. She drove slowly, not saying anything, her eyes on the roadway. He sat watching the people out walking on the pavement.

Suddenly and without looking at him, she said : 'Why don't you like me, Frankie?' Frankie considered it, then says : 'Oh I like you all right. Anybody don't like you is punchy.'

She slowed, then swung the car off the hill to the right. They were close to the waterfront. The street was narrow and with solidly built sandstone houses, the stone weathered and beginning to flake the way sandstone does.

'I like you very much,' she said.

'You got the wrong boy. You know nothing 'bout me. I'm just a bum. I in't going anyplace. You meet somebody going someplace. Somebody got good manners and say the right things. Me, I don't even able talk right.'

'Please don't say that,' she said. She had the car parked.



'Best thing you do is go away. That's the best thing.'  
He opened the door and got out.

'Please,' she said, and the way she said it made him feel bad.

He slammed the door and through the open window, says : 'You go on now - go on,' he says. She sat with both hands on the wheel, looking out at him, very sad and hurt-looking and tears in her eyes. Every time he left her she was sad and with tears in her eyes.

'Your bag,' she said.

He took it through the window. 'You go on now,' he says. She didn't move and just sat there that way and her face slowly going to pieces. He started walking. He walked some way, then heard her start the motor, and he stopped and watched her drive down the quiet street toward the waterfront. He felt low as hell and hating it. It hurt him all right.

Looking at the numbers on the houses, he found he had to go back the way he came.

Williams was at the door. 'I wondered where you were going,' he said. 'I saw the car stop. Women trouble?'

Frankie shrugged his shoulders. Williams led him through a small waiting-room into the surgery. The surgery was the front room. The window behind his desk looked on to the street. Frankie sat on the hard-backed chair by the desk. Williams put some instruments in a chrome sterilizer, then took a look at the cut. 'That's healed nicely,' he said, nodding his head to himself, then sitting at the desk : 'Heard anything of your friend?'

'I called a couple times. They told me he was all right but no visitors.'

'That's so. It's rest he needs. That's something Madden never had.'

'You know him a long time then?' says Frankie.

'Yes. Off and on the past twenty years. I'm afraid he never quite got all the breaks he deserved.'

'What he do?'

Williams looked at him strangely. 'You don't know him then?'

'I only know him a couple days,' says Frankie.

'And I thought he finally made it,' said Williams. 'I never saw him so excited or as happy as was when you put Griffon away. I thought he had finally found what he had searched so long for.'

'What you talking 'bout?' says Frankie, not seeing any of it.

'Did you ever hear of Billy Gabriele?'

Frankie thought a moment. 'He's a fighter?'

'He fought an eliminator for the middleweight crown about, let me see – ten years ago. He could have made it too, but a bad marriage ruined him. Then there was young Freddy Bartholomew. He was the finest boxer I knew apart from Jack Britton. They were all out at the old Mount Dermott training camp when he took bad. His appendix burst. Complications set in and he died a week later. It broke Madden's heart.'

Frankie stared out the window, not saying anything.

'I suppose you're being hounded to get into the game now?' Williams went on. Frankie looked at him.

'You couldn't do better than Madden. Though I don't know if he could do much now.'

'I signed a couple days back.'

'Oh,' said Williams. 'With who?'

'Scheff. Mr. Scheff,' says Frankie. 'Know him?'

'I think I've heard of him.' Williams got to his feet. Then changing the subject: 'I think we better get the medical part over with.'

Frankie lay on the couch. Williams put a gauze pad over the eye. First thing Frankie felt was something cold working across his forehead, then the stitches move under the skin as they came out.

'You know Scheff?' Frankie asked.

'Slightly – only slightly,' said Williams, painting the cut with an antiseptic solution.

Frankie sat up. "Thanks. How much do I owe?"

"That's all right. I was glad to help. Maybe you'll let me have a couple of tickets when you make the main events?"

"If I do that."

"Oh I think you probably will," said Williams, showing him to the door. "I certainly hope so."

"Well thanks again, Mr. Williams," says Frankie.

Williams watched him walk up the street carrying his bag, and thinking maybe he should have told him.

'SURE HE'S STILL raw,' Lang said to Scheff. 'He'll be that way for a time yet. The only thing to get over that is experience. A couple of years from now everybody will have heard of Gallagher.'

'So now you think he'll make it?' said Scheff, smiling.

'He'll make it all right. There's no doubt about that. He's the best prospect I've seen for years - yeah, I know, I know. I wasn't sold on him. I admit that. And his knowledge of the business is atrocious, shocking. He's a born brawler. The only thing comes naturally is hooking. But I never saw a middleweight with the punch he's got. Either hand too. He's some puncher. Then again, the drilling is going to be the big job. And he's slow till it takes his fancy. I've seen a pint of milk turn quicker than him.'

'Two years, heh?'

'Maybe not. Maybe more.'

'Any idea when he'll be ready for the first one?'

'I don't know yet. I don't want to take any chances with that eye. I tell you what. Why don't you come

downtown tomorrow and see him for yourself? I've fixed up Eddie Galli for a work out. Around eleven?"

"Can a lady come too?" asked the girl from the bar where she was sipping mineral water and listening to it all.

"Sure, why not?" said Lang.

Scheff watching her, said: "Well, she shows signs of coming to life at long last." And to Lang: "These last two weeks she's been living like a nun."

"I thought it would be a change," she said.

"You never went to see Volek," said Scheff.

"That polack!"

"Could he help where he was born, baby?"

"Don't baby me." She went back to sipping the mineral water.

"Brother am I glad I don't have women in my troubles," said Lang, rising. "Then, till tomorrow."

"Sure, Wally. Let's all see what he can do."

"So long," Lang said. "Goodbye, Helen." Remembering the girl as he went out.

Scheff went across and poured himself a drink. The girl moved away and sat on the divan. She wore a white cashmere sweater and tight black skirt. He brought his drink with him and sat on the edge of the desk facing her. He wondered how long she took to choose the sweater. Her breasts thrust out and up, the nipples sharply defined under the soft wool. It was much of a sweater. She had long slender legs, not too slender, but rounded and shapely with it, the thighs smooth and mature, and her stomach flat below those remarkable breasts. He was looking at her legs.

"Find them attractive?" She set her empty glass on the table and lit a cigarette from the box.

"You know I do. You're the most attractive woman I ever saw." He sat by her on the divan. "What's the matter, baby? Is something bothering you? Tell Nate, baby."

"It's nothing."

'Come on now. You haven't been your usual wonderful self these last two weeks.' He held her hand, their hands resting on her thighs. She put her head back and around to him, her fingers tightening in his. 'No. I suppose I'm not. I'm sorry, Nate.' She smiled. 'Maybe I'm just a little tired. That's all it is. I'm sorry if it's affected you. Really I am.'

He held her hand in both his and kissed her, and kissed her neck. He let his lips travel down the long lovely curve of her neck. 'I love you, Helen,' he said against the warm white skin.

'I love you too, Nate.' Her eyes wide open and staring at the horses thundering toward the finishing-line in the painting; and not seeing any of it.

He sat up, his arms around her and her against him. 'I know what it is, baby. You need a rest. Why don't you go away for two or three weeks?'

She smiled up to him. 'I don't know, Nate. I'll get over it. It's just how a woman sometimes feels.'

He kissed her forehead. She smelled of Chanel. He wondered if it was Chanel. He wondered if she used Chanel all over. It was quite possible. He would have to get her some other perfume. Chanel was getting terribly common. You could not drive downtown but you saw Chanel advertised. He would get her something really exclusive. Something rare. Something by someone who did not need the vulgarity of advertising to sell. He kissed her again, his hands moving up under her arms.

'Please,' she said, her eyes deep and dark and shining maybe with the coming of tears.

'All right, baby,' he said, and meaning it.

She let him hold her close again, not thinking now, glad to feel comforted.

'I know,' he said, 'we'll go out and have lunch.'

'There's no need to. Really.'

'Nonsense. We'll go to Katzmer's. You'll feel grand afterward'

She sighed deeply, him feeling her move against him,

her glad to have the boy's face out of her mind. 'Then we'll go to Katzmer's, darling.'

'That's my girl - now smile.'

She smiled.

FRANKIE WAS SAT on the bench wearing blue woollen briefs and a sweat shirt. Lang was over by the door talking to a wide-looking boy wearing a belted raincoat. They were talking low and maybe about something that might change the whole outlook of humanity. Frankie had on the black tights now, the bodice cut low at the front and back and the shoulder straps over the sweat shirt. He put the fight shoes on and got up and worked his feet into them. Then he put his outdoor clothes in the locker and brought out the jar with his mouthpiece.

Lang had finished talking to the wide-looking boy. 'All set?' he asked. Frankie nodded.

Lang put the two rolls of bandage on the rubbing-table with the adhesive tape. 'Give me the right.' He started around the wrist, then down over the hand, between the fingers, and back over the hand, Frankie flexing his hand as the bandage built up. Then Lang cut the tape in strips, pinching them in the middle, sticking one end to the back of the hand, bringing it between the fingers, then sticking the other end to the gauze over the palm of the hand. 'All right?' Lang asked.

Frankie flexed his hand a couple of times. 'Okay, yeah.'

Finishing the other hand, Lang collected the Vaseline and a towel. Frankie followed him out carrying the cup and the jar with the mouthpiece.

There was quite a crowd out there. All the usual boys were working-out. Hennig had an audience as he worked

on the big bag. Hennig was the best-known fighter in the gym. Right then they were trying to fix him a shot at Billy Shorr's title. The big bag was getting the whole works from the blank-faced Hennig, the heavy ones booming out around the gym, then shouldering and hooking and the short socking driven in hard. Dryer and Malone watched him work.

Frankie loosened up on the mats. A lightweight worked alongside him. Out on the floor a balding heavyweight skipped rope, snorting loudly with the exertion.

'How's it going, kid?' This one wearing old green tights over a black sweat shirt, said. 'I'm Galli.'

'Pleased to meet you,' says Frankie.

Galli was in his thirties, still in pretty good shape and making the supporting bouts in a main-eventer now and then. He carried plenty scar tissue around his eyes and mouth.

Lang came over carrying two sets of headgear.

'Morning,' said Galli.

'How are you?' asked Lang.

'Fine,' said Galli, then walking around rotating his arms and shoulders.

'Try this one.' Lang handed Frankie a set of headgear.

He put it on and fastened the strap.

'How is it?'

'Okay,' says Frankie, nodding.

Lang hooked his thumbs into it. 'Hang on to it afterwards.' Then to Galli. 'All ready?'

'Sure,' said Galli.

When Frankie climbed into the ring he saw Scheff and the girl sitting a little way back from the apron. Scheff looked up, smiling. The girl smiled too. Frankie gave Scheff a nod, then with his back to them, pulled the cup up and on.

'Okay?' said Lang.

'Yeah, okay,' says Frankie, rubbing his shoes in the resin.

Lang unfastened the headgear, pushed it back, and

smear Vaseline on his face. The Vaseline killed the gym smell and he could taste the greasy petroleum down the back of his throat. Then Lang fastened the headgear again, and with Frankie holding out his hands, pulled the big gloves on, then worked them around before the lacing. 'Remember what I said. Take it easy. Set your own pace. And when I give you the signal - open out. Okay?'

Frankie nodded. He had forgotten about Scheff and the girl. He felt all wound up and tasting Vaseline right down to his belly.

In the other corner an Italian-looking boy wearing a white coat was lacing Galli's gloves. All the while Galli was talking through the ropes to a nigger wearing a blue raincoat and wide swing-back hat. The nigger would nod every so often and show a mouthful of white teeth. Lang took the mouthpiece out the jar and fitted it in Frankie's mouth. It was cold and tasted sharply of mouthwash. He ran his tongue around it and swallowed a couple of times. It got rid of the Vaseline taste. Now everything tasted of mouthwash.

'Go to it, boy.' Lang patted him on the shoulder, then went out through the ropes. In the other corner the boy had finished with Galli. Frankie turned around and with his hands on the top rope, flexed his knees, then worked his shoes in the resin. He breathed easily, in through the nose, out through the mouth. He felt a little clumsy with the headgear and big gloves, and moved around, feeling himself in the rig-out, arms hanging loosely, breathing easily.

The bell took him by surprise. Galli was out in the middle of the ring. Frankie rammed the left in his face. Galli rode with it, came back and the left was there again. Then it was the left again and the right crossing to land high on the head. Galli blinked and grabbed for his feet. Frankie carried plenty steam. Galli thought he would speed up some and came in shooting the left up high and way out. Frankie let him come, working off the high left, and Galli collecting on his arms and



shoulders. That was how the first round went, not so fast, them left-handing most of it and the breathing easy above the scuffling of their shoes.

Frankie stood in the corner with the mouthpiece in the palm of his glove.

'You're doing fine,' called Lang leaning in over the ropes. 'What did you do that time?'

'Maybe I was heavy with it.'

'Seems you were – this round the same.' Then Lang got down off the apron and went around to Galli's corner. Whatever it was he said to Galli he said it quick. The bell rang. This time Galli came in, shot the left out and got down with the gloves up high and the elbows in. There was nothing Frankie could hit. He switched his hands low and tried a left hook. Galli took it on the elbow and put the left in Frankie's face. Frankie crowded in, Galli tied him up, got the left loose and uppercutted.

Okay, okay, Frankie was thinking. Okay, all right.

Next time Galli went into the crouch, Frankie walked it around. Frankie wasn't one went much on the footwork. Suddenly he turned, faked the left and hooked the right. Galli took most of it up high on the left arm. It still lifted him back a couple of feet. Frankie followed it with the left to the head. Galli sat down. Some of the boys around the ring got pretty excited about those two. The rest of the round they just coasted, left-handing it again, only Galli not reaching much with his and you know why when you see the red patch partly on his arm and ribs. That boy Frankie could hit them, and some. Two shoulder shots like that not properly placed but they still woke Galli up to it.

Lang was up in Galli's corner when he came in. Galli hooked out the mouthpiece and spat over the apron. 'If he was wearing fight gloves that one was going all the way through me. Almost broke my arm.'

'You all right?' Lang asked.

'Who are you kidding? I won't sleep on that side for a month! I could feel my heart stop ticking.'

'I wanted to keep it going for another two before I opened him out.' The boy was around back of Galli working on his ribs.

'Lay off,' said Galli. 'You want to kill me?'

'We'll call it off after this one,' said Lang.

'Suits me fine.'

Frankie was circling around in his corner, arms and shoulders relaxed.

The bell rang. They put their mouthpieces back.

'The last one,' called Lang.

Galli turned and looked him as he went out.

Never lead against a hitter unless you can out-hit him. Oh my Christ, thought Galli. What I do for money.

He started fast and gave Frankie the left in the face. Frankie took it and crossed with the right on the left hook. It landed on Galli's ear-piece. Galli countered and came up on the inside, hitting both hands to the body. Frankie threw him off, stuck the left in his face as he came back, tried a right, got tied up and took a right-uppercut. It jolted his head back and Galli hit another two crisp shots to the body. Galli had the motor running full out now. Frankie came back with a long left, Galli got under it and let him have a left to the body and the right to the head. He landed twice more before pulling out. He made Frankie look plenty slow. Frankie tried the left hook and got tied up. Then over Galli's shoulder he saw Lang standing on the apron with his arms open wide.

Okay. Yes, Mr. Lang. Watch for the signal. Remember this. Remember that. Yes, Mr. Lang.

Frankie got his hands loose, left right left right left right, leaning on Galli and pumping them in. Galli dropped into a crouch, gloves high, elbows in. Frankie stepped back, measured it, then put everything behind two to the guarded head. With nothing to fire at it was all brute force. Then he hit another right-hand to the head, then another. With those two he clubbed Galli the whole of one side of the ring, Galli stumbling but not

coming up. Frankie hit him two more. It was just plain old right-hand stuff now. He hit them so you expected to see the stuffing come out his glove and Galli's headgear. The next one brought Galli's gloves down. He upped the left hand in clear of the shoulder. Galli's head went back and he pushed the left out. Frankie thundered the right in over the left arm at the shoulder and Galli lifted cleanly off the canvas and went down on his back. Lang caught him by the arm. 'Take it easy! Take it easy!' There was plenty noise from outside the ring. Two of the boys from the ringside helped the Italian-looking boy get Galli to his corner.

Frankie had the mouthpiece out. 'I do that at the start if you give the okay,' he says. 'This slow-motion, take it easy, you hit me, I hit you, wait for the signal stuff in't no good. Anymore that stuff and you going tie knots in my brain. They start hiding behind their arms that way you just got keep hitting till they not able hold them up no more. That's the way I see it.'

'Sure, sure. Take it easy,' said Lang.

They went across to the other corner where Galli was sitting on a stool.

'Sorry, Eddie,' says Frankie.

'Sure,' said Galli. 'Forget it. You're going a long way, kiddo.' Then to Lang. 'Next time you're looking for somebody don't bother looking for me.'

'Come on,' Lang said to Frankie. 'You better take your shower.'

They went out to the dressing-room, Frankie still carrying the mouthpiece in the palm of the big glove, and the crowd watching them go by.

HENNIG WAS STANDING by the ring with Malone. He was wearing the blue woollen bathrobe he used around the gym, towelling hood over his head, cooling out after the morning's work. Malone was talking to him and them both watching Frankie up in Galli's corner.

'How are you doing, Lou?' said Gessler, coming up behind them. Hennig grinned, reaching out his hand wrapped in soiled gym bandage. 'How are you yourself, Harry? Long time no see.'

'Oh, I've been around,' said Gessler, taking the hand.

'Sure, Harry. The day you're not around won't be the same.'

'How's Dave?' Gessler said to Malone. 'Still got the bellyache?'

'Was them beans during the war. Them beans. Awful.' That was Malone.

'What's Lang doing with a kid like him?' Hennig asked, nodding at Frankie.

'That's a good question,' said Gessler.

'Way out his class.'

'Lang always was out his class,' Malone said. 'Lang - oughf!'

'I thought Lang was washed up after Hackmer folded,' said Hennig.

'So he was,' Gessler said.

'Where did the kid blow from?'

Gessler shrugged. 'Showed up in Weinberger's with Madden. Somehow Madden's gone out the picture. The first day he flattened Griffon.'

'We heard about that,' said Malone. 'About time somebody buttoned Griffon's lip.'

'Long time since I saw Madden around,' Hennig said. 'Madden could have brought that kid on,' said Malone. 'By the way, Lou,' said Gessler. 'How's the prospect of a shot at Shorr's title going?'

'Need you ask? We're being rail-roaded. There's talk of an eliminator with Volek now. If it takes much longer I'll be fighting Shorr out a wheel-chair.'

Malone suddenly : 'See that kid? You see him? I just remembered - Graziano. He's another Graziano.'

'That could be,' said Gessler.

'Sure. Sure it is,' said Malone. 'He's another Graziano. See him walk too?'

Frankie was on his way to the dressing-room with Lang.

'I think he's maybe a bigger puncher than Graziano was,' said Hennig.

'Think so? Graziano could slug it all right.'

'Hey! Wait a minute you big Irish bum. When did you ever see Graziano?'

Malone grinned. 'I was out there with Sammy Carron. Remember Carron?'

'Was about the dirtiest bastard I ever saw,' said Hennig. 'That's the only thing you remember him by.'

Gessler cutting in : 'You remember Carron, Lou?'

'Sure. I was starting out then. I saw him a couple times before they took his licence away.'

'Do you mind?' said Malone.

'Go ahead.'

'Well we were out there with Carron and we saw Graziano take the title off Zale in the Chicago Stadium. The way they fought you knew it wasn't going the fifteen. Zale put him down in the third with a left hook to the body and a right cross to the chin.' Malone was back living it all through again. 'At nine he gets up. He's looking like he don't know where he is. Zale let him have some more. He can't set him up. Then Graziano come back swinging lefts and rights like he's going break Zale in two. That's how it was all the way. Then in the

sixth Graziano lets him have it all rolled up in one – Boom – right in the kisser. Crash ! It's curtains all round.'

Gessler and Hennig were standing back watching him throw all those lefts and rights. Malone suddenly saw them. 'What you looking like that for?' he said.

'Now you see how these micks are when they get punchy,' said Hennig.

'You put up with this all the time?' said Gessler, playing it along.

'Are you kidding? This is one of his better days.'

Malone looked first at Hennig, then at Gessler. 'Balls !' They laughed.

Then Hennig said : 'Look at that.'

Scheff and the girl were talking to Lang and Frankie outside the dressing-room. Scheff was making a big thing out of Frankie. The girl was standing between them looking Frankie in the face with those big violet eyes. Frankie was trying not to look at her and nodding in turn to Scheff and Lang and not hearing a word they said. That was how she worked on Frankie.

'This place stinks,' said Hennig.

'If I'd guessed I'd have guessed right,' Gessler said.

'If the kid stays around that mob long he's ruined,' said Malone.

'Well, that's him took care of,' said Hennig. 'Who's the love-sick doll?'

'That's Helen Guerrera,' said Gessler.

'The singer?' Malone asked.

'That's her.'

'How do you like that Lou? – Helen Guerrera.'

'I said he was took care of.'

'Some doll,' Malone said.

'Yeah,' said Gessler. 'Some doll.'

'ARE YOU SURE about this?' said Scheff. 'We don't want to make any mistake.'

'We're not making any mistakes,' said Lang. 'This is just what we wanted. Jacobson gave me the okay. He's glad of it. Two days doesn't give him much time to find a substitute around here for Peters.'

'Isn't eight rounds pretty steep for a first-timer?'

'The way he is he could go fifteen.'

'I don't know,' said Scheff getting up from his desk.

'Don't worry.'

'This Humphreys is a tough-looking boy if I remember. He was on the same card as Volek last time he fought out at Crosby Park. He won too.'

'It was a decision,' said Lang, getting up off the divan and going over to the bar. 'I know he's got guts. He's got stamina as well. But I don't -'

'I don't know, Wally.'

Lang finished pouring his drink. 'I tell you don't worry. I know what I'm doing. This Humphreys is just what we're looking for. He's got a nice open style. He doesn't punch too hard, and he likes to go in. He's got to go in. That's the way he's made - he won't last in there more than five.'

Scheff was standing in middle of the floor not looking at Lang and thinking about it.

'Well?' Lang said.

'All right. Have it your way.'

'That's better,' Lang said, brightening and pouring another drink. 'When this is over he's right in the public eye. Humphreys has got a good record. Plenty of people know Humphreys.'

'Have you told the boy yet?'

'I'll tell him after I've signed with Jacobson.'

'What's he going to be doing before the fight on Thursday?' Scheff joined Lang at the bar.

'The weigh-in is at three o'clock. Then he can rest a while before we go out and eat.'

'You can take him up to my place. Mike can fix you something to eat.'

'Suit yourself.' Lang poured Scheff a drink.

'Yes. Take him along after you finish in the morning. Up there it's away from it all.'

'You worrying again?' Lang was in grand mood and on the fourth whisky.

'No. I just don't want to take any chances with him. We might have something big here after all.' Scheff hadn't touched his drink yet.

'He's the berries all right,' said Lang smiling, his grey face lit up.

'Well you better go over and see Jacobson.'

Lang put his glass down. 'Sure. Right now. I was only waiting the go ahead.' Then going out the door, said, 'Don't sit up all night.'

Scheff stood at the window looking out across the roadway. The day was cold and grey and the leaves beginning to fall from the trees. A number of cars were parked out front of the Belvidere, and under the trees the water from the fountain was blowing in the wind and spraying the grey paving wetly around it. The traffic was very quiet and only the fallen leaves blowing in the wind.

Somebody came in the room.

'That you Kruft?' he asked, without turning around.

'Yes it's me, Kruft,' she said.

'Oh it's you, baby,' he said, smiling.

She joined him at the window. 'It's pretty, isn't it?'

'Huh. What?'

'The trees and the water from the fountain blowing in the wind. I like the autumn. You can think in the autumn.'



'Yes,' he said. 'You can think about winter.'

'You were thinking about more than winter when I came in.'

'Yes, I was,' he said, pouring another drink. Then :  
'Something for you, baby?'

'Just a small one.' She had just come in off the street, and had that fine feeling after a walk in a sharp wind.

He gave her the drink. 'You look very lovely this morning,' he said.

'Thank you,' she smiled. 'I walked from home. All the way. It was lovely.'

He stood with the glass in his hand, swilling the whisky around in the bottom of it.

'What are you thinking about, Nate?'

'Humphreys.'

'Who on earth is Humphreys?'

'Gallagher meets him on Thursday at St. Joes.'

'Oh,' she said, and her voice showing it.

Scheff looked at her. 'Something wrong?'

'No. No nothing.' And looking out the window, she said, 'It's raining now.'

He stood watching her by the window. She was far away and not seeing the fine rain blowing in the wind with the wet dead leaves.

THEY TOOK A TAXI back to the Bruckner from the weigh-in at the commissioner's office in the City Halls. When they went in, Lang got the young nigger to make them something to eat. Frankie relaxed in one of the deep easy sitting chairs in the lounge. Over the cocktail bar was a lithograph of The Nonpareil, bull-necked, wearing a high-

buttoned waist-coat under a coat with a velvet collar. The Nonpareil was very cold and aloof from it all.

Lang came in and took a pack of cards from behind the bar.

'Want to play till the nigger's ready?'

'All right,' says Frankie.

Lang brought across the coffee table. They had not finished the first game when the nigger came in. 'You want to eat here, sir?' he asked.

'Sure. Bring it in.'

The nigger came back with a tray with a portion of stewed prunes, two soft-boiled eggs, a large mug of tea, and two crackers on a side plate.

'What's that?' says Frankie, looking at it.

'That's yours,' said Lang. 'Anything wrong?'

'It in't much, is it?'

Lang looked at him. 'Everybody eats along that line the day of a fight.'

'Well it in't much in my line.' Frankie not impressed.

'Go ahead, eat.' Then to the nigger: 'Just bring me coffee.'

Lang drank coffee and flipped cards while Frankie ate.

After eating they played some more cards. Outside the wind drove the rain against the windows. They played cards the rest of the afternoon. Shortly after six o'clock the rain stopped.

'It always this way before a fight?' says Frankie, bored.

'How do you mean?'

'Well, you know - wasting time this way.'

'What do you want to do, boat on the lake?' Lang glanced at the clock over The Nonpareil. It was almost seven o'clock. 'You can eat some more now. I told the nigger seven o'clock.'

'In't that nice?' Frankie says. 'I just thinking I'm so hungry I'm not going to be able climb in the ring.'

Lang gave him a long look. 'Come on. We'll eat in the kitchen.'

The nigger met them in the hall.

'We'll eat in the kitchen,' said Lang. 'You ready?'

'Yes, sir.' The nigger led the way.

First was spring vegetable soup, followed by steak and green beans. They ate without talking. The nigger stood over back of the kitchen with a magazine.

Part way through the steak, Frankie says, 'How many fighters Mr. Scheff got?'

The nigger never raised his head.

Lang looked at Frankie across the table. 'None. Why?'

'I just asking.'

Lang shrugged. 'Well, he had a couple. Never got far. One was a bantam, and the other a welter. Like I said, they never got far.'

They finished the steak in silence. The nigger took the plates away, then brought Frankie tea, and Lang coffee.

'That was a great steak, Mike.' Frankie says to the nigger.

'That's right,' said Lang, nodding.

Mike smiled. He was a young Negro with tight-curling hair cut close to his skull.

'Where did you learn cook like that?' Frankie asked.

'Nassau, sir. I worked for the best chef in Nassau.' He sort of smiled while he spoke the way only niggers can.

'That's right.' Lang said.

'You know this chef in Nassau too?' Frankie says.

'Cut it out,' said Lang.

Back in the lounge Frankie lay on the long wide divan. Lang turned on a wireless somewhere behind the bar, then sat down with the playing cards. The announcer came on the air and said they had a programme of recordings by Andre Kostelanetz. The only light was from a tall standing lamp over where Lang played cards. The bottles and glasses on the shelves behind the bar reflected the light brightly. Over the bar, The Nonpareil seemed more cold and aloof than ever. Outside the wind still blew against the windows. Frankie went to sleep listening to Kostelanetz play *Bewitched, Bothered and Bewildered*. He played pretty well this Kostelanetz.

When Frankie woke the room was quiet, Lang had put the cards away and was standing behind the bar with a drink.

'How do you feel?'

'Okay.' Frankie stretched on the divan. 'How's the time?'

'We got ten minutes before we leave.'

Frankie lay where he was. Lai ɣ had the lights on over the bar.

'How was he?' says Frankie, pointing.

Lang looked up at The Nonpareil. 'All right, I suppose.'

'Ever see him fight?'

Lang put the glass down. 'How old you think I am?'

Frankie grinned. Lang made a sound through his teeth.

'All right,' said Lang. 'Let's go.'

Frankie collected his bag and they went downstairs to the taxi.

Outside St. Joseph's Arena the crowd was milling around the front entrance and taxis driving up and stopping, and cars parked along both sides of the street. The driver took the taxi around back to the dressing-room entrance. A uniformed policeman stood in the doorway.

'Frankie Gallagher,' said Lang as they came across the pavement. The policeman stood aside and watched them go past.

'We've got number seven,' said Lang as they walked on up the long low-ceilinged passage.

Inside the dressing-room were green steel lockers, a bench along one wall and the rubbing-table in middle of the red tile floor. Over back of the room were the doors to the toilet and showers. The walls were painted powder blue and two lights flush in the white ceiling. The room was heated by radiators grilled into the walls. Lang had the bags open and everything laid out on the rubbing-table. Frankie was undressing when somebody knocked on the door. Lang called for them to come in, and this

little fellow in a baggy suit came in carrying a travel-bag.

'Evening, Mr. Lang.' He smiled. Four front teeth were missing and his nose all to one side of his face.

'How are you, Charley?'

'Fine, fine.' All the while he blinked and jerked his chin up like maybe his collar was tight. He put his bag down, opened it, then got out a long white coat and put it on. The coat could have gone around him twice.

'Fix the bottle will you, Charley?'

He got a bottle and pail out the wide-doored locker the back of the room and went out to the shower. When he walked it seemed as if no part of him truly belonged to himself.

'Who that?' says Frankie watching it all.

'That's our pail-man,' said Lang cutting tape with a scissors.

'I never knowed we have a pail-man,' says Frankie.

'Oh, yeah. Charley Brunek. He's all right is Charley.'

Frankie had on the cup and trunks and was lacing his shoes. He wore an old grey woollen bathrobe given him by Lang. Charley came back and put the pail with the bottle inside it on the floor under the table.

'Hello, champ,' he said as if he had just seen Frankie for the first time.

'Sure,' says Frankie, and not all that sure about this one.

'Wait a while before you get the ice,' Lang said to Charley.

'Okay, Mr. Lang.' Charley seemed as though he ran on clockwork; the smile, the nodding of his head and the jerky way he moved even when standing still. He had a touch of the blink too. So fast sometimes you did not notice it. He had plenty leather in his head all right.

For the first time they heard the crowd, a low, heavy rumbling like thunder far off on a day with the sky closed down.

'A big house out there tonight,' said Charley.

'That's good,' said Lang.

There was a knock on the door and the security guard put his head in and said : 'The first one over.' And Lang said : 'Who was it?'

'Billy Shea, T.K.O.,' said the guard, and closed the door.

'That Janiro cuts something awful,' said Charley. 'If he cut himself shaving he'd bleed to death.'

Somebody knocked on the door. Charley opened it.

'Mr. Gallagher?' said the page boy from the front house.

'What is it?' Lang asked.

The boy gave Charley a brown paper wrapped box. 'For Mr. Gallagher, sir.'

'Who sent it?' asked Lang, eyeing the box.

'I don't know, sir. I got it at the front office.'

'All right.'

Charley put the box on the table. 'Maybe we better get the lawman take it out and open it.' The way he said it you knew he meant it.

'What are you talking about?' asked Lang.

'Got be careful 'bout parcels,' said Charley. 'Sometimes they got bombs in parcels.'

'What do you think this is, Hollywood?' Lang said, then stripped the wrapping off the box. Inside was a beautiful green and white silk bathrobe.

'Jesus Christ,' said Charley.

'That isn't for me,' says Frankie.

'It's yours all right.' Lang laid it on the table. Across the back of the gown was FRANKIE GALLAGHER in big white letters.

'How 'bout that?' said Charley. 'He got friends with money.'

Lang took the card out the box, read it, then gave it to Frankie.

Somebody knocked on the door.

'What the hell's going on tonight?' said Lang.

The door opened before Charley reached it, and Gessler said, 'All right if I come in?'

'Sure, sure. Come right in. It's guest night.' Lang disgested. 'Get the ice, Charley.' Charley went out for the ice.

'Thought I'd give Frankie my best wishes,' said Gessler.

'He don't need them.'

'That right, Frankie?'

'He's only kidding,' says Frankie.

Gessler saw the bathrobe. 'That's some outfit.'

'It in't mine,' says Frankie.

Gessler met his eyes. 'It's got your name on it.'

'You heard him,' said Lang.

Gessler picked the card off the table. 'So,' he said.

'So what?' Lang said.

'So she gives him a bathrobe. What's wrong with that?'

'You know all right, Gessler.'

'What you talking 'bout?' says Frankie, watching them.

'Nothing at all,' said Lang. Then to Gessler: 'Now if you don't mind we've got a fight in a little while.'

'Sure,' said Gessler. And to Frankie: 'You wear it, kid. She's a nice girl.'

Frankie didn't say anything. Charley came back with a white enamel pail and a good-sized chunk of ice in it.

'You finished?' Lang said to Gessler. Gessler never looked at him. 'Good luck, Frankie,' he said, then went out. He passed the deputy from the commissioner's office coming in with the gloves. 'Ready Lang?'

'I don't know. It's guest night - Charley!'

Charley came out of the shower room.

'Charley, go down to Humphreys.'

Charley went out, and Humphreys' man came in; and with Frankie sitting on the table, Lang started bandaging the right hand. Humphreys' man watched him bandage both hands. The deputy took the ink-pad out his pocket and stamped the tape across the back of each hand, then wrote his initials under the imprint.

'I'll be back for the gloves,' Humphreys' man said.

'The start of the last round,' said Lang.

Humphreys' man went out, then Charley came back. 'Everything was okay, Mr. Lang,' he said. Lang nodded, he had the white coat full out on the table and putting things away in the pockets. Frankie walked around, shadow-boxed, and the shoes scuffing the floor and squeaking some.

'Hey, champ,' said Charley.

'Yeah?' Frankie never stopped.

'When I come in there's some-looking doll out there asked if you got the parcel.'

Frankie stopped. Lang took a look out the door. 'How long you known this girl?' Lang asked Frankie, closing the door.

'I don't.' Frankie was moving around again.

'Don't give me that.'

'Sure I don't. I only see her a couple times.'

'Well if you know what's good for you, don't see her again.' Lang was looking straight at him.

'I once had a looker like her,' Charley put in.

'You?' Lang said.

'Yeah. Was a maid up the city. Big blonde. Was a real looker she was. We used to go out to the races at Longview the afternoons she was off.'

'Wasn't that romantic?' Lang said. 'You and her at the races.'

'Muriel her name was.'

'Come out the clouds. You got everything ready?'

Frankie was really moving around now, shadow-boxing and his breathing coming easily and regular.

'Okay,' said Lang, clearing everything off the table.

Frankie swung up and lay out on it on his back. Lang shook the towels over him, first wiping the sweat beginning to show on his face. Then he covered him with the woollen bathrobe. 'What do you want to do with this?' asked Lang, holding the box.

'Give it to charity,' says Frankie with his eyes shut



against the light from the ceiling. Lang shrugged, and put the box on top of the lockers.

After a little while there was a knock on the door and the guard put his head in and said : 'Last round coming up.'

Charley went out and Humphreys' man came in. Lang had already started on the left glove.

'Hey. Wait a minute,' said Humphreys' man.

'What's wrong?' Lang growled.

'I'm supposed to be here when you put the gloves on.'

'You think we got pig-iron in them?'

Humphreys' man looked disgusted. Lang finished the job without anybody saying anything, then he said : 'All right?'

Humphreys' man nodded, then went out.

Somebody out in the passage shouted : 'Middleweight bout next. Humphreys and Gallagher in the ring.'

Lang cupped his right hand up. Frankie slammed the left glove, then the right into it a couple of times. Then Lang fixed the hood over his head, lifted the woollen bathrobe over his shoulders and tied it around the front. Charley came in, nodded to Lang, got the ice-bag, the pail and bottle, then followed Frankie and Lang out into the passage.

It was quite a walk out to the aisle, then down the aisle, the house lights on and the crowd taking it quietly. Lang climbed on the apron and held the ropes apart for Frankie. Humphreys was already in the ring. The announcer climbed through the ropes with the microphone and held one arm up for the crowd. The crowd was quiet and he could have talked without the microphone. He started the introductions. Lang had the robe off Frankie and talking to him while Charley leaned in through the ropes. Frankie stared at the canvas and worked his shoes in the resin while Lang talked. Then the referee called the fighters and Lang took the hood off Frankie before going out. The house-lights had dimmed and cigarette and cigar smoke showed blue under the

white ring-lights. Humphreys was taller than Frankie, blond, and one of those streamlined middleweights. The way he carried himself you knew he had plenty big ideas about Humphreys. Frankie no more than looked at him while the referee spoke.

Humphreys came out, guard up high, elbows in. Frankie walked into the straight left. Humphreys worked it from the shoulder. Frankie took a couple more lefts in the face trying to get his own in. Humphreys didn't force it much and was content with the straight left. Frankie countered with the left when Humphreys brought the right over. Most times Frankie took the right on the shoulder. Frankie looked awful slow out there. The crowd was still quiet. Humphreys kept up the straight left and crossing more often with the right now. Frankie looked as if you could hit him with a banjo. Humphreys was pretty sure of himself now and stepping it up, threw a big right-hand shot for the head. Frankie dropped, shifted and hooked a left under the ribs all in one, the right going high over his head. You heard the flat, hollow thwump right the back of the hall. Humphreys was arched up, hanging on, eyes closed, mouth open, his head on Frankie's shoulder. Frankie gave him the old one with the shoulder, backed out and hooked one in under the left elbow. Jesus Christ, you heard that one too. On the way down he hooked the left in so hard Humphreys' head almost come off. He went down out in the middle of the ring. The bell rang. The referee looked at Humphreys, then grabbed Frankie's arm up. Frankie hadn't even got a sweat on. He was stood up there with the referee holding his arm and looking as surprised as everybody else. It was over so quick the crowd didn't know it.

The announcer climbed in the ring with the microphone. Then the noise started. It was so noisy you couldn't hear a word the announcer said. Humphreys hadn't moved. Frankie didn't hear anything but the roaring in his head. Lang was yelling something and Charley had his face stuck in Frankie's and yelling some-

thing else. Everybody was yelling. Lang finally took the mouthpiece out and ran the cold sponge over his face. Charley put the hood on and lifted the bathrobe over his shoulders. That way they got him out of the ring. A crowd was around Humphreys still on his back in middle of the ring with the doctor. It seemed an awful long walk back to the dressing-room with everybody standing up and shouting as they went by.

Lang cut the bandages away, Frankie sitting on the table still wearing the hood and bathrobe. His face was puffed some around the eyes and mouth. With his head hooded and the shoulders sloping way out in the bathrobe he looked plenty tough sitting there watching Lang work on the bandages. Charley was on one knee getting the shoes off. Every so often he would say : 'Holy Christ.' Nothing more, just : 'Holy Christ.' And shaking his head that way and blinking so fast you couldn't see it. That was Charley excited. He was some Charley all right.

That was how they were when Scheff came in. He was smiling big and a cigar gripped between his teeth. 'Well, well,' he said, slapping Frankie on the shoulder. 'That was some show you put up tonight, heh? Some boy - some boy.' Looking now at Lang 'I told you, didn't I, heh?' Then to Frankie again. 'Great stuff, boy. And you're just starting. You're going to go the right places. I knew that the first time I saw you. Isn't that right, Wally?'

'Sure,' said Lang.

'There's some friends of mine out there who want to meet you.' Scheff to Frankie. 'How about it? We're going back to the Ecuador after the main bout. A little fun won't do you any harm, heh?'

Frankie looked to Lang. 'I don't know, Mr. Scheff - I was thinking maybe I'd turn in early.'

'Oh, come on,' said Scheff. 'It won't do you any harm.'

'I think maybe he better do what he says, Nat,' Lang said. 'You know how it is with a first-timer, the excitement and things?'

'If that's how you feel, boy.'

'Thanks just the same, Mr. Scheff.'

'Sure. Sure, I know how you feel.' Scheff dusted ash from his evening coat. 'Next time, heh?'

'Yeah,' Frankie says. 'Next time.'

Scheff put the cigar back between his teeth, brought out his wallet and folded some money into Frankie's hand. 'Have a drink on me later, heh, boy?'

'Sure,' says Frankie.

'Good boy.' Scheff slapped him on the shoulder again. 'Sorry you don't feel like the party.' And to Lang: 'Come around and see me tomorrow, Wally.' Lang nodded. Scheff raised his hand to them and went out, happy with himself and very important-looking in his evening suit.

Frankie looked over to Lang. Lang was packing his bag. 'Better get your shower now,' he said.

When Frankie came out the shower, Lang was over by the lockers wearing his overcoat and smoking a cigarette. 'Feel better?'

'I feel okay,' Frankie says.

'Well I'm going now. Take tomorrow off. And remember - you're doing all right. Good-night. Night, Charley.'

'Yeah. See you, Mr. Lang,' said Charley.

Frankie started dressing. Charley put the pails away in the wide-doored locker. Outside, the guard was calling for the main bout.

'You done it tonight, Frankie.' Charley was waiting for him to finish dressing.

'Yeah. We done it, Charley.'

'I never see three like those before. Boom! Boom! Boom! Holy Christ, no.' Charley nodding to himself.

Frankie finished dressing and picked up his bag. 'Got everything?'

'Sure.'

'You want a beer?'

'Lead on, champ.' They went out the door, Frankie walking that curious way of his and Charley carrying

himself in bits and pieces and you could see he was slug-nutty a mile off.

The wind had fallen and it was raining again. The rain fell through the arc-light outside the entrance, thinly but heavy, and it running in the gutters. Maybe in the dark it sounded a little worse than it was. They saw the lights of a bar across the street. The guard came to the door as they went out into the rain.

It was a small bar with a flight of stone steps leading down to the door from the street. You couldn't see the name out front in the dark. The walls were veneered and with pink shaded lights. Stools were set along the front of the counter. Two or three couples sat at the tables out on the floor. Frankie ordered two beers from the white-coated barman. The glasses were tall and the beer very dark and the top very white in the pink light. Frankie drank half right off. It tasted cold and clean and killed the taste of the mouthwash.

'Mind if I ask something, Frankie?'

'Go ahead.'

'Who was the doll gave you the robe?'

'Oh, she's a singer,' says Frankie. 'Yeah.'

'She's some doll.'

'Yeah,' says Frankie. They both drank the cold beer.

Then Charley said : 'I put the robe in the bag.'

Frankie didn't say anything, instead shoved some money in the top pocket of Charley's coat.

'What that for?' Charley asked, looking at him.

'That's something for tonight.'

'Lang paid me. Sure he did.'

'Here. You worked for it.' Frankie glanced around the bar. A couple at the table in the corner held hands. The man was what these women newspaper writers call distinguished-looking. You know, fat, forty and growing bald and grey at the same time. The girl wore a black cocktail dress with a red rose growing out between her breasts. She kept glancing coyly up at the distinguished-looking gentleman with large brown eyes and wondering

how she was going to lose something she had lost a few times already.

'Hey. See the doll over there?' said Charley. 'She puts me to mind this other doll I have one time.'

'You must do all right on the quiet,' Frankie says, going along with him.

'Well, you know how it is. In them days I got more hair. Anyhow, this doll was a Chink. She worked in one the laundries down the Island. When I first see she's interested I say, Charley, I say, now is the time you going find out if them stories you hear 'bout Chink dolls is true.'

Frankie looked at the barman, and he looked at Charley.

'So I take her out this night,' Charley going on. 'And, boy, can she drink! By the time we got home she three-quarters the way there and back. Then I have her up on the doorstep and just when I almost find out, the door opens and I am standing there looking up at this Chinaman big as a dozen Charlie Chans put together. He don't say nothing and just draws one all the way up from the ground. It was the dirtiest punch you ever see.'

'So what happened?' says Frankie.

'What happened?' said Charley, indignantly. 'I got up and ran, that what happened. I don't stick around for hatchet meat for no Tong men. I don't care if it goes left to right or up and down or looks like a hot-cross bun.'

Frankie and the barman were laughing.

'What so funny?' said Charley. 'This was serious. If them Tong men caught up with me you don't see me here tonight.'

'Heey! I' said the barman looking past them. 'Get a look at that!'

She was standing inside the doorway. She smiled to them. Charley got down off his stool as she came across the floor. She wore a black suit and a tiny hat of feathers and had a stole around her shoulders.

'Can I join you, or is it strictly a stag-party?' she said, very sweetly.

'We, we just having a beer,' says Frankie finding his voice, and the perfume she wore making his head go around.

Charley didn't waste any time. 'I, I'll see over the gym, champ.'

'You going now?' says Frankie, saying it for the sake of saying it.

'Yeah. Yeah, I going.' He was grinning and his head tugging his neck out of his collar that way.

'S'long,' says Frankie after him.

When he was gone, she said : 'Can we sit down?'

Frankie got his bag and they went down the far end of the bar to a table. The barman brought the drinks. Afterward, Frankie says : 'How come you pick this place?'

She smiled to him. 'I went around to your dressing-room but you'd gone. The guard told me where you were.'

He studied the grain of the table top.

'I thought you'd be at this party of Scheff's,' he says, finally.

'Not me. I work there. I want to enjoy my time off.' Then lowering her head to look at him out of the top of her eyes, said : 'You were wonderful tonight.'

'I guess things just go good for me.' He still did not look at her.

'You're too modest,' she said. 'You're an awfully nice boy. I don't think anyone has ever been lucky enough to spoil you.'

With her that way he felt awful bad about it all inside.

She reached out her hand on his arm. 'Why didn't you wear the robe? Didn't you like it?'

He could not find it in him what to say. Then suddenly : 'No, I - It's a great robe. I ne-er see one like it before. Everybody says what a great robe it is. Sure.' Then the slow smile on his white face. 'Only I think I wear a great robe like that my first fight and get flattened it don't look so good.' He lied.

She laughed softly. 'But you'll wear it next time?'

'Yeah. Sure, I'll wear it next time.'

'You're my boy,' she said.

'Huh!'

She laughed again. 'Don't be upset – you're my boy. It's a saying. You know, *you're my boy*.' She made it flippant.

'Oh,' he says, and not knowing anything about anything except her eyes were awfully big and them looking inside him that way.

'You're serious again.'

'Not me.'

'You are. You're always serious. Every time we've met you've been serious. When are you going to stop being serious?'

'I in't serious.'

She smiled. 'All right. You're not serious.'

'Why didn't you go Scheff's party?'

She sipped her drink, making him wait, then slow and deliberate: 'Why should I? I only work for him. That's all.'

He didn't say anything.

'What's the matter?' she asked. 'Don't you believe me?'

'Sure. Anything you say.'

'Don't be cynical. I told you I just work for him. I know you've seen me with him but there's nothing in that. That's true.'

'Forget it – want another drink?' he says, to change the subject.

'I thought fighters didn't drink?' she said.

'I don't know.'

'Volek drinks. I've seen him drunk.'

'Jack Volek?'

'Yes. Mr. Scheff manages him too. Didn't you know?'

'He don't tell me,' says Frankie, puzzled.

'Mr. Scheff says Volek is going to fight Shorr for the title next year.'



'He got to stop Shultz first.'

'Let's talk about something else.' She smiled.

'Another drink?' he says.

'How about one at my place?' she said, very brightly and watching him.

He felt her hand on his arm. A thickness came into his throat, and he breathed a deep breath.

She picked up her bag, put her stole around her shoulders, and he followed her out.

They sat in the car in the dark with the rain falling loudly on the roof and streaming down the windscreen. She sat turned toward him, her face shadowed and him not seeing her eyes in his, and only the reflection of the arc-lights through the rain on the windscreen on the long delicate curve of her neck. He could hear the softness of her breathing and the small movement and her close and warm to him. He had that high tight feeling in his chest and the thickness now worse in his throat so it almost choked. He bent his head to her face and saw her eyes closed and heard himself breathe and her breathe and the rain falling loudly on the roof. He kissed her lightly on the cheek then found her mouth. Her lips parted and her warm and real and trembling gently with his arms around her. Afterward she sat with her head on his shoulder and her arms around his neck. He felt her fingers move smally under the neck of the sweat shirt.

Then : 'Frankie,' she whispered against him. 'Oh, Frankie—Frankie, you're wonderful. So wonderful.' He travelled his lips over her cheek, then her forehead, her hair smooth and sweet-smelling against his nose and mouth. She moved her head. He felt her eyelash flutter against his cheek. Then she held her head away, face lifted to his. He kissed her. They kissed a long while.

Later, she said : 'Maybe you ought to drive?'

'No,' he says, having difficulty with talking. 'You better go ahead.'

She started the motor, and with them sitting there,

warm air began to come in from the heater. Then she put the motor in gear and drew away from the kerb. He sat back, hands resting between his knees, not looking at her and not seeing the wipers run the rain from the windscreen, but, sitting there and hearing the rasp of nylon as she worked the pedals; the soft intimate movement seeming loud and meant for him and so loud above the running of the motor and the steadily falling rain.

She parked the car in the rank out back, and he took her arm and they ran through the rain together. The porter was in the hall with an electric polishing machine working on the marble. He looked up as they came in. She smiled to him. They rode up in the lift, her turning to him as soon as it started moving, her cheek against his shoulder and looking up to him. He kissed her forehead. The rain glittered in her hair. Her arms were around his waist. The lift stopped. They stood close together and her eyes wide and happy.

'This thing's stopped,' he says, finally.

They both laughed. She shook the rain from her hair, the drops glittering as they fell in the light.

It was quiet and warm and not even the sound of the night. She switched on the tall standing lamp by the divan, then went back and put the remaining lights out.

'I think you better dry some of that rain away,' she said. 'This way.' He followed her upstairs.

'There,' she said, halting at the top of the stairway. 'You'll find the switch on the left.' The bathroom was large and the walls fitted with copper-tinted mirrors. The porcelain was yellow and the bath sunk flush with the coloured cork floor. Everywhere were shelves and bottles and decanters, and everything bright and sparkling under the concealed lighting. He dried the rain off his head with a yellow turkish bath towel. The towel was soft and faintly scented of her. The old thickness in his throat came back.

In the hallway were two doors, one slightly ajar and a

light inside reflecting greenly on the wall. He went on downstairs. It was quiet and a clock ticking somewhere, and the ticking sounding very loud. He parted the heavy curtains. Outside it was dark and the rain on the window.

'What will you have to drink?'

He just looked at her.

'Well?' she said.

'Anything – sure,' he says. 'Yeah.'

She wore a heavy blue satin housecoat, and walking to him, her legs showed with the movement of the gown.

She put her hands on his shoulders. 'But you're absolutely soaked,' she said. 'Let me put this on the radiator.'

He took the windjammer off while she watched the movement of muscle along his shoulders under the tight-fitting sweat shirt. She came against him, her arms going around his neck. He let the windjammer fall to the floor.

'Frankie.'

He kissed her mouth, her teeth bared against his lips and her trembling as he held her, and feeling those breasts crushed to him, and feeling them through the heavy satin and the cotton sweat shirt, and feeling her warm and alive and altogether to him.

'Oh, Frankie. Oh. Oh. Darling one.' She spoke against his mouth. His throat was truly choked and the beating of his heart big in his chest and in his head. She moved. He felt her move. He could feel her breathe. He could feel the beating in her chest in him. She buried her head under his chin, holding herself to him, knowing he felt every movement and her moving that way. She could feel all of him, and feeling the greatness of his chest through the thin cotton and her fingers tracing the curve of the neck muscles and the long heavy muscles from the neck to the shoulders and the shoulders through the thin cotton sloping way way out and her fingers tightly now on the biceps and them smooth and hard and swelling so her fingers could not go around them. She brought his arms from around her, found his hands, and held them,

not talking, not hearing, not seeing, but feeling all of him in them and in her mind : and she sat on the divan and brought him down to her, then ran her fingers through his dark hair and brought his mouth to hers.

Afterward. 'Oh, Frankie. Do you think you could love me? Please? Just a little?'

He heard her but all of him inside was choked.

'I've never loved anyone as I love you.' She was looking in his eyes now and her holding his head slightly away from her. 'I know I've never loved anyone. I love you. Believe that, please. Please, darling.'

'Don't talk.'

'I want to talk. I want to tell you I love you - I love you, darling.'

'I love you.' His mouth was dry and him feeling the warmth and roundness and smoothness of her through the heavy satin.

He kissed her. All of her trembled. Her lips were smooth and warm and wet; and the scent of her.

'Oh, darling. Darling, darling, darling.' She held herself to him so it hurt. He could feel all of her against him and her trembling and talking so low he did not hear what she said. Then louder, she said : 'Tell me you love me, darling. Please.'

'I love you.'

'That's it. That's it, darling. Tell me.'

'I love you.'

'Look at me! Please! Here! And here! Look at me. Look, darling.' She was beautiful and warm and smooth and beautiful. 'Now. Please, darling. Now. Please.'

'I love you. I know it.' And all his head going around inside.

'Tell me now. Now. Now. Now.'

'I love you.'

'Thank you. Oh, thank you, darling. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.'

'Don't talk.'

'Oh, darling - '

It was quiet and the clock ticking somewhere in the big darkness; and outside, far off, the wind moved the trees and blew the wet dead leaves in the rain in the night.

IT WAS A bright cold day and the first snow had fallen thinly in the night. The time was half-past two o'clock in the afternoon and the frost had not lifted any. Lang got out from the taxi, turned up the collar of his grey crombie overcoat, paid the driver, then crossed the pavement.

'Good afternoon, Mr. Lang,' said George.

'How are you, George?'

'Very well, sir. Mr. Scheff has just lunched and asks you to go right on up.'

Scheff turned from the window as Lang came in.

'Well, what's it all about?' asked Lang, throwing his derby on the divan and unbuttoning his overcoat.

'Did you work the boy today?' Scheff was nervous and maybe just said the first thing he thought.

'Don't tell me you called me over here to ask that?'

'No I didn't.' Scheff was wound up about something all right. 'I just asked.'

'Well, I did. He gets better every day. Mind if I have a drink?'

Scheff lit a cigar. Lang poured a big one, then glancing around the office, said. 'Where's our fair lady today?'

'How the hell should I know? She only comes in here evenings. Maybe she's broken a leg or something.'

'All right, all right.' Lang took off his coat. 'So there's more women.'

'Don't tell me that.'

'All right. Have it your way.'

Scheff joined him at the bar. Lang poured another one for himself and one for Scheff.

'You've got it bad today,' Lang ventured after a while and not looking at him.

'Forget it.'

'Anything I can do?'

'What could you do? Anyway, she's been this way the last two or three months.'

'Haven't you asked her about it?'

'Ever tried asking a woman anything?' Scheff was looking out the window.

The clouds were low and snow-laden. The roadway was dark where the light snow and frost had been worn off by the traffic. Out front of the Belvidere the bare trees were frosted and dead-looking above the frozen fountain.

'Isn't there something more bothering you, Nat?'

Scheff came away from the window. 'Cohn's bothering me. Everything's bothering me.'

'Well there's not much I can do about Cohn.'

'No. No, there isn't.' Scheff looked tired. 'Let's not think about it?' He sat down at his desk. 'Let's think about more important things.'

Lang poured another big one. 'Did you think it over about Eddie Walton?'

'Sit down.'

Lang shrugged, then brought his drink with him to the divan.

'Can't we be more ambitious?' Scheff went on.

'How do you mean?' said Lang, sitting up.

'How would you like to make a big rake-off? I mean really big.'

'Wait a minute. Has this got to do with Gallagher?'

'Just listen me out, will you?'

'Look, don't get any fancy ideas about this one. He needs time. He's coming on well now. He's had six in four months and all inside the distance. Brown took him the longest and that was five.'

Scheff studied his finger nails, cigar between his teeth. 'I know all about that. Just wait till you hear what I have to say. This thing is almost sewed up. I wanted it that way before I mentioned it. This is an investment.'

'I know your investments, Nat. I'm one of them myself. But this kid isn't going in any tank job.'

'Did I say he was going in the tank? Did I say anything of the sort?' Scheff had brightened a little and was enjoying it now.

Lang sat holding the glass in both hands.

'Now, let's take it from the beginning. Jack beat Shultz all right?'

'T.K.O.,' said Lang, without enthusiasm.

Scheff smiled. 'Does it matter?'

'It took him eleven.'

Scheff spread his arms. 'Never mind the details. He won. Now it's Shorr.'

'What about Hennig? He's waited a long time. Maybe Shorr will give it to him.'

'I don't think so, Wally. Not after today.'

Lang got up and went over to the bar. Pouring a drink, he said : 'So that's it. Now Shorr takes the easy way out. How much did it cost?'

'Don't let's get bitter about it.'

'I'm not bitter about anything. In another year Gallagher will have it all. There's nothing to stop him. Even now I'd put my pile on him against Volek.' Then him looking squarely at Scheff : 'But what's this got to do with Gallagher?'

'Shorr hasn't fought in almost a year. Before he goes in with Jack he's got to make a show. Two or three warm-ups.'

'Why don't you say it all at once? I'm beginning to lose track.'

'All right. What about Shorr meeting Gallagher in a warm-up?' said Scheff, leaning forward on the desk and watching Lang.

'You're talking out the back of your head.'

Scheff laughed aloud.

'What makes you think Shorr is going to go in there and risk getting his head knocked off for nothing? You're nuts,' said Lang, unbelieving.

Scheff rubbed out the cigar, then joined Lang at the bar. 'You think I haven't thought about it?'

'From my angle there isn't much to think about.' Lang found the bottle.

'That's where you're wrong. There's plenty to think about, listen.'

FRANKIE PUT EDDIE WALTON away in the fourth. Walton was down twice in the third, and in the fourth he dropped out under a body barrage. Frankie had stopped two good ones early on and his left eye and mouth were swollen. He never put in much work in the opening two, but when he started to step it up the crowd went wild. He had himself quite a following now. Everybody loves a puncher, especially one who could take it. Frankie could take it all right.

He had just finished dressing when the guard showed Scheff and the girl into the dressing-room.

'That was a pretty good showing, Frankie.' Scheff smiling big to him. 'Isn't that right?' he said now to Lang.

'Yeah. Great stuff', said Lang, the other side of the table packing his bag.

'You're going right to the top, boy. Right to the top,' Scheff said. Then said to Lang: 'Isn't that so?'

'Sure. To the top,' Lang said without enthusiasm and going on with the packing. Frankie took his windjammer out the locker. Scheff was behind him, and putting on the



windjammer, he smiled to the girl. She smiled back to him, and Scheff said : 'Well there's your fighter, Helen. What do you think of him?' Then winking to Frankie : 'She's nuts about fighters. It's something biological.'

She ignored him, then said to Frankie : 'Doesn't your eye hurt? He hit you awfully hard.'

Scheff laughed. 'Hear that? Walton hit him awfully hard.' He laughed again. 'Walton doesn't even know what day it is, heh.'

Charley laughed with him. Lang looked sick. Something bothered Lang.

'You were pretty good in there,' Scheff went on. 'Pretty good. Hear me, boy?'

'Yeah. Sure, Mr. Scheff.'

'I think you could take Shorr. Do you know that? I think you could take him.'

Frankie looked at Scheff, then at Lang.

'Go ahead, Frankie,' said Lang. 'I'll see you in the gym tomorrow.'

'Well?' Scheff said.

'Shorr?' Frankie says.

'That's right. Wouldn't you like a shot at him?'

'You mean that?'

Scheff shrugged. They were all watching him now. 'Maybe it could be arranged.'

'Shorr wouldn't look at me. What he want to fight me for? What 'bout Volek?'

The way he said it took the smile off Scheff's face. 'What about Volek?' he said.

'He's one of your boys too, in't he, Mr. Scheff?'

'Who told you that?' Scheff looked at Lang. Lang looked right back at him.

'I heard it around Goldman's. Okay?' says Frankie, watching it all.

'Well you heard wrong.' Scheff, slowly. 'I haven't got any say in Volek. O'Dowd came to me when they were out of luck a long time ago, and for the help I gave I got ten per cent of him. Ten per cent doesn't give me a say

in anything. All I do is collect. And it isn't much. Isn't that right, Lang?

Lang had on his overcoat. 'Yeah. Ten per cent', he said, and not looking at any of them.

'See?' Scheff said to Frankie. 'I'd back you against Volek any day. Sure I would. Isn't that right?' To Lang.

'I'd back him against Volek too—next year.' Lang picked his bag up and walked to the door.

'Where are you going?' Scheff asked.

'I've got a home to go. Good night.'

'What's wrong with him?' Scheff said when he was gone.

Charley put the buckets away, then got his bag. 'That's everything, champ. See you tomorrow.'

'Sure, Charley. Tomorrow', says Frankie.

'Slug-nutty', Scheff said when he was gone. Scheff felt bad about something. Frankie didn't say anything.

'How about a drink at the club?' said Scheff, suddenly big-hearted again. 'What do you say, Helen?'

She looked at Frankie.

'How about it, boy?' Scheff said. 'One night won't do you any harm.'

'Maybe he doesn't feel like it?' the girl said.

'Of course, he does. We've got a lot to talk about.'

Outside it was snowing, coming down big flakes; the flakes falling very slowly and heavily. They took a taxi, all three sitting in back, Scheff talking and Frankie and the girl not listening to him and seeing each other when the darkness was lighted passing under the arc-lights.

THEY SAT AT SCHEFF'S private table, screened from most of the club, and looking across the heads of the dancers

to the door from the foyer. The maître d'hôtel stood inside the door. The orchestra stopped playing and the dancers went back to their tables.

'Well, what do you think?' said Scheff, glancing around the place, then at Frankie.

'I guess it's something all right,' says Frankie. The lights fading now and only the candlelight.

'You know,' Scheff leaning across the table sort of confidentially. 'Twelve years ago I was a book-keeper for a cigar importer. Now this, and more. I'm a pretty big boy now. I'm Nathan Scheff. Everybody knows Nat. You know that.' Frankie watched him talk.

'You've got to reach out. Take what you want. Unless you do that you're nobody. You can do that, boy. You can be somebody, if you want.' The girl watched Frankie's face. The orchestra had started playing, the music soft and in mood with the candlelight.

'Well I don't know how you think Shorr's going to fight me. I got as much chance to fight Shorr as Charley has, maybe less.'

Scheff lit another cigar, the rich scented smoke clouding the table. Now it was champagne, shaded lights, and cigar smoke.

'You misunderstand the whole situation, Frankie. I didn't say it was a title shot – not yet. It's almost a year since Shorr put the crown at stake. Now the Commission is getting impatient. He's got to make another defence pretty soon. It's probably going to be either Hennig or Volek. Of course, it might be Bobby Rosanne, but I doubt it. I say Hennig or Volek.'

All through the talking the girl watched Frankie's face.

Then Frankie says : 'Where do I fit in this?'

Scheff poured champagne all round. 'Shorr isn't going in with his title at stake after all this time without a warm-up. That's where you come in. Right, boy?'

Frankie shrugged. 'What good that going do me?'

Scheff smiled. 'You beat Shorr and for a start you jump the ratings. You're also the logical challenger if he retains

the title against Hennig or Volek. And if either of them beat him then you're still in with a chance.' Then pausing. 'You've got nothing to lose, boy. Nothing.' Scheff could talk, and some.

Frankie was thinking about it. 'How we know he's going to pick me for the warm-up? There's plenty others he can fight.'

Scheff sat back smiling, cigar between his teeth. 'Leave that to me. Let's see what I can do. All right?'

Frankie nodded, then glanced at the girl. The girl looked at the table. It was warm and only the candlelight and the orchestra playing something very romantic.

'Don't you like this stuff?' asked Scheff, looking at Frankie's glass.

'It's okay, sure.'

'You've hardly touched it.' Scheff beckoned to the waiter. The waiter was tall, dark, long-faced, and with his hair parted on one side and oiled and combed across in tight little waves.

'Bring a bottle of Bacardi Rum, Giulio. Ever drink Bacardi Rum, Frankie?' The waiter brought the bottle of Bacardi Rum. Frankie tasted it. It minded him of lighter fuel.

'How's that, boy?'

'Pretty good,' says Frankie, and thinking you could make this stuff at home in glass jars under the bed.

Scheff ordered another bottle of Perrier-Jouët. Scheff poured from the new bottle for himself and the girl. Frankie watched the girl watch Scheff pour. She was beautiful and with candlelight in her eyes and her skin clear and smooth and the sheen of candlelight on her hair.

'To the future champion,' Scheff said, raising his glass.

The girl watched Frankie. The waiter came around the table and spoke into Scheff's ear, Scheff looking toward the door. Two men came in, passed the maître d'hôtel and came through the dancers to the table. Both were tall, one wearing a belted raincoat and carrying a felt

hat; the other longer and older and his overcoat collar turned up. They came up to the table, the snow on their coats melted and glittering in the candlelight.

'Hello, Nat,' the long one said.

'Hello, boys,' said Scheff. 'A drink?'

'No, thanks,' they said.

'Business?' Scheff asked, looking from one to the other.

'Want to talk about it here?' the long one asked.

The other one, who was blond, could not take his eyes off the girl.

'All right,' said the long one. 'We'll take it here. We've just come up from East Street. Somebody threw a turpentine bomb in the window of your new shop.'

Scheff was on his feet. 'How bad?'

'Burned out,' said the blond one getting his eyes off the girl. 'Burned right out, Mr. Scheff.' He said it like on the moving-pictures. You know, tough and thinking he knew all the answers; and one night he would walk down a back alley and some kid would give him a rap on the head with an empty bottle. He was plenty tough all right.

'Did you get who it was?'

'We haven't got anybody yet,' said the long one.

'What about Cohn?'

'Been at home all evening,' said the tough one. 'Got a blonde to prove it.' He smiled at the girl as he said it.

'Do you want me to come down to the station?' Scheff asked.

The long one smiled. 'We don't think you'd burn down your own shop, Nat.'

'Not even for the insurance,' the other one said.

'Shut your mouth!' Scheff was plenty mad.

'We'll let you know when we find out anything,' said the long one.

'Sure, sure. You two couldn't find your way home in a fog.'

They went back across the floor, the blond one arrogant

and wishing everybody to know he was a policeman. Jesus Christ, some policeman.

'It was Cohn. I know it was Cohn,' said Scheff. 'You'll have to excuse me.'

'Anything I can do?' says Frankie, getting up.

Scheff stopped. 'No, thanks. I'll handle this my way.'

They watched him go.

'Who's Cohn?' Frankie asked the girl.

'He was a big bookmaker in town till Nate opened up. Now Nate takes most of the business.'

The whole thing had soured the night. Even the orchestra did not seem to play so well. The warmth and candlelight was still there but something had gone out of the night.

'Do you want to go?' she asked.

He smiled. 'I thought it was always the gentleman asked the lady?'

'Not this time, darling.' She was looking into him that way.

He waited in the foyer while she went back for her coat. There was no one on the door. She came out wearing a fur coat and cossack-type hat.

'That a cute hat,' he says.

She lifted her face to him, smiling, her eyes smiling too.

'You're cute, too,' he says. He felt her hand in his, soft and warm; and getting that feeling all through him.

It was still snowing outside. They walked back along the street through the quietly falling snow to her car. He cleared the snow from the front and rear windows while she ran the motor. She headed the car out on to the street and braked sharply as a big saloon swung in to stop outside the club. As they drove past two men were climbing out. Frankie recognized Wouk, then they were lost in the snow. 'There go the heavy mob,' he says.

'I hope there isn't going to be any trouble.'

'No,' he says. 'They came for a prayer-meeting.'

'Isn't it awful?' she said. They were headed down the

Island. The snow was from off the water, thick white flakes, falling very slowly, and only two clear arcs on the windscreen where the wipers worked and the snow building up with each sweep.

She parked the car headed toward the city. They sat in the dark with the snow falling outside.

'Isn't it funny how cozy the snow makes everything seem?'

'I never see cozy snow yet,' he says. She smiled back to him in the dark.

'Aren't you going to ask me in for coffee?' she said.

'It's going to get real bad soon,' he says.

'I'm not frightened by a little snow,' she said.

He sighed. She heard it in the dark and her heart high and fast in her chest.

'All right,' he says. 'Have it your way.'

'I intend to,' she said, her face lifting and him feeling her against him in the dark. He kissed her mouth, her lips soft and trembling, and gently holding his face to hers.

Then after a while, she said : 'Am I going to have that coffee, or are you not feeling hospitable any more?'

'If you don't mind walking or sleeping out in the snow.'

'I wouldn't mind sleeping out in the snow. I think sleeping in the snow would be wonderful.' They went upstairs.

He put the light on, it hurt the eyes after the dark and gave the feeling of suddenly being awakened. She glanced around the room, her face registering no hint of how she found it. She drew the collar of her coat tightly under her chin.

'I guess it's colder in here than outside,' he says. 'I'll put the fire on.' He went past her, found the matches and lit the fire. It burned yellow bright and noisily, then gradually quietened. He felt her eyes on him. He could do that. It was the same in the ring before the bell rang. Then he heard her move and the light went out. He stood

up, the sharp dry heat on the back of his legs. She came up to him.

'Oh, Frankie. Frankie.' She stood against him.

The fire reflected on the ceiling. His eyes accustomed to the dark, he saw her face and her eyes open and looking into his face. Her eyes were awfully deep.

'Tell me, Frankie. Please tell me.'

He put his hands under the coat on her waist and felt the smallness and warmth of her.

'I love you, Helen. Christ I love you. Don't ask me again. You know it's true.'

'I want you to keep telling me. Oh, I do. I do.' Her lips moved smally and she put her head on his shoulder and her mouth under his chin. He felt her mouth and her warm breath and her lips parting slightly and the way she moved her lips. His mouth was dry. Where he stood he saw out of the window. The arc-lights down on the hill dimly lit the snow falling past the window in the night.

'What do you see out there, darling?' She was looking up at him now.

He came all the way back to her. 'What you say?'

'What do you see out there?'

'Oh, I don't know. I guess everybody can see something out there.'

'Do you want to tell me?'

'Maybe it in't good to hear them things.'

'Are you afraid?'

'I don't know.'

'Don't be afraid. I love you. Do you hear me?'

'I love you, Helen.'

She gripped both his hands. 'Let's go away, darling. Away from all this and everyone.'

'We can't do that. You know it. Maybe after when I get in the big-time. I can do it then.'

'I want you now. We don't have to wait.'

He let go of her and turned so he looked out at the snow falling in the night. 'Maybe you wait some. Maybe



you even got it wrong. For me I could do it, sure. But for you I don't know. You don't know me, Helen. I got nothing inside. Inside is empty. I only started feeling inside after I met you.'

'Don't talk that way. Please. It's you I want. I don't care about anything but you.' She was crying. He held her close, feeling her crying silently against him.

'Don't cry. I love you. Hear me, Helen? I love you.'

She reached her face up. He kissed her, feeling her tears wetly on his face.

'Tell me, darling. Oh, *tell me.*'

'I love you, Helen. True I do.' His hands were under the coat and she was warm and all of her wanting him. He told her again, all of her tightly against him in the dark. The snow fell slowly and heavily and out in the night in the snow were many things seen through many eyes.

SCHEFF WAS WALKING the floor when they came in, Kline and Wouk, heavy in their overcoats and their derby hats pulled over their eyes. Scheff stopped walking. 'Where the hell have you been?'

'We were in a card game over in Bizzarro's,' said Kline. 'How were we to know?'

'You get paid for knowing,' snapped Scheff.

They stood with their hands deep in the pockets of their overcoats and didn't say anything.

'You know what to do,' Scheff went on. 'I want it done right. Nothing goes wrong, okay?'

They nodded, watching his face. He was worked up all right.

'He's over in Critchell's. I've called Carter. He'll have something ready for you. Now get moving.'

Kline went for the door. Wouk remained where he was.

'Well, what are you waiting for?'

'Don't you think it best we got somebody from out of town?'

'There's no time. I want it done now. You've been here all night. You've got nothing to worry about.'

Wouk started for the door.

'And listen,' said Scheff. 'George has a car outside. I told him one with a running-board. Use it. And when you're through, ditch it.'

'Don't worry. We got it all,' said Kline.

They went downstairs.

George had the car parked up the street. They put their gloves on as they walked. The car had a running-board all right. Kline wiped the snow off the windows, then got in and started the motor. The petrol gauge showed the tank was full. The car had a heater and the incoming air warmed their legs. Sitting there, Wouk unbuttoned the top of his coat and brought the Astra 7.65 out from under his left arm. He checked it carefully, then put it back in the holster. The gun was heavy and had a short barrel. To shoot an Astra you had to get plenty close because it jumped so. But, Jesus Christ, hit somebody and you could put your hand in the hole.

It was snowing bad. On the hill the snow was packing hard under the night traffic, and Kline using the gears and keeping close to the crown, brought the car down the long hill and on to Lovell Street. They were in the Jewish quarter of the Island and most all the shops were old-fashioned and shuttered.

They stopped outside Carter's Gunshop and got out. That close to the water it was bitterly cold and the snow blowing in out of the darkness. There was an arc-light outside the shop. Nobody was about. They went into the doorway. Wouk knocked on the glass. Snow was beginning to drift in the doorway. A light came on in the shop and the door slowly opened. Carter looked out at them,

then took the chain off and let them in. Carter was a long-nosed hunchback and wore thick-lensed spectacles.

They went through the shop to the back room. Everywhere were guns and fishing-tackle. Over the back of the room was a work bench. A stairway led upstairs to the rooms over the shop. Nobody had spoken any. Then Carter opened the door of a long wall-cupboard and brought out an old Gladstone bag. He put it gently on the work bench. They all looked at the bag.

'There it is gentlemen,' said Carter. 'Be very careful with it.' When he spoke he peered over the top of his spectacles.

'How careful?' asked Kline, looking at Carter.

'I told you very careful. Drop it and -' He spread both hands, palms uppermost.

Kline looked at Wouk. 'How does it work?' Wouk asked.

'On impact,' Carter watching them. 'All you have to do is throw it. Or drop it.'

Kline's throat was dry. 'That's your baby,' he told Wouk.

Wouk looked suspiciously at the bag, then lifted it very carefully, Kline and Carter watching. Then he put his ear to it.

'It's not a time bomb,' said Carter. 'I told you how it worked.'

Kline looked at his wristwatch. 'Time we got going. Come on.' They went out to the car, Wouk walking slowly and carrying the bag with both hands.

COHN AND GESSLER were in at the bar in the Reine Pedauque.

'So you think this kid's really got something?' Cohn said.

'If you had seen him tonight you'd think the same,' said Gessler.

Cohn smiled. 'Well I couldn't make it, Harry.'

'Why don't you marry this doll?'

'I will - sometime. How about another drink?'

Gessler looked at his glass. 'All right. One more. Then I'm going to eat.'

Cohn ordered the drinks. The bar was still fairly well crowded. There were dancers out on the floor. 'Why don't you eat here?' Cohn said.

'Can you imagine Critchell frying ham and eggs?'

'Then why don't you come home and we can play a few hands then have breakfast?'

Gessler glanced at his wristwatch. It showed twenty minutes to three o'clock in the morning. 'Ham and eggs?' he asked.

Cohn grinned. They finished their drinks and went out.

It was still snowing, though not so heavily. The glow from the neon sign on the canopy overhead turned the snow pink. A number of cars were still parked outside but the street was quiet in the thinly falling snow. They walked over to Cohn's car, Gessler going around front of the motor to the off-side door. Cohn wiped snow from the windows.

Gessler looked up and down both sides of the street.

Cohn saw him. 'What's bothering you, Harry?'

'Don't know. Got a feeling of eyes in my back.'

They both looked up and down the street. Nobody was about but the doorman in under the canopy on the steps.

'Scheff wouldn't pull anything like that,' said Cohn.

'I told you I feel eyes in my back.'

They were standing either side of the car. Cohn got in and unlocked the door for Gessler.

Sitting in the car, Cohn said smilingly. 'You see too much of the big box, Harry.'

'Not me, Ruby,' said Gessler, serious.

Cohn shrugged, put the motor in gear, and swung the car out on to the street. There was hardly any traffic. Gessler sat looking out the windscreen. They were headed over the west side of town. Hot air from the engine circulated the windscreen and prevented the snow building up. They were coming up to some traffic lights. Gessler turned around in his seat, and through the thin covering of snow on the rear window, saw the headlights of a car coming up fast behind them. 'Keep going!'

Cohn looked at him.

'Keep going I tell you!'

Cohn put his foot down and they shot the lights.

Gessler still looking out the window saw the headlights fade as they left them behind.

Cohn looked at him again. Gessler grinned. 'Go on, say it. Too much of the big box.'

They both laughed.

'Scheff has you bugged all right, Harry.'

'I know him. That's my trouble.'

'Sure,' said Cohn seriously. 'I guess he's already made his mind up it was me.'

Gessler settled back comfortably, and they drove the rest of the way in silence.

'WHAT THE HELL you do that for?' Wouk shouted.

'I couldn't help it. I was so busy watching the car I didn't see the lights.'

'They know now.' Wouk watched Cohn's car cross the intersection against the lights. 'Look at them go!'

'The hell they know,' said Kline. 'He couldn't stop when the lights changed. You can't touch the brake on this road.'

The rear of the car had slewed into the kerb under the lights. Kline carefully drove around on to the adjoining road, then getting her on to the crown, put his foot down.

'This isn't the way they went.' Wouk looking out the window.

'I know.' Kline didn't take his eyes off the road. 'He shot the lights didn't he? Now he's got to head back this way. We'll be home before him.'

'What about Gessler?'

'Just you think about Cohn.'

The main west road out from town had been sanded, and once on the carriageway, Kline hit it up. Wouk sat gripping the bag on his knees with both hands and feeling sick.

When they swung on to Palm Road West, the dashboard clock showed twenty minutes past three o'clock. It was one of those residential districts with big old houses set back in huge gardens and gravel driveways running up to the houses through the trees. Wouk sat watching the houses on the right-hand side of the road. 'There she is,' he said.

Kline stopped the car. The street was quiet and empty. There hadn't been much traffic on the road and the tyres gripped the snow fairly well. They sat looking at the house. It had a wide semi-circular driveway, and an entrance either end of the garden. Along the low wall grew shrubs and all the trees growing the back of the house. No lights showed in the windows.

Kline backed the car up the driveway of the house directly opposite, then stopped about half-way up. From there they could see part way along both ends of the road. Kline stopped the motor and sat forward on the seat, his heart beating up in his throat. Wouk kept glancing from one end of the road to the other, all the while swallowing. After a while, Wouk said : 'Maybe they're home?'

'There was no tracks on the drive,' Kline not looking at him said. Then : 'Know what to do?'

Wouk nodded, then cleared his throat.

The snow had almost stopped falling. Kline got out and wiped snow off the windows. The car didn't show any lights. It was awfully quiet and a sound in the night like the ocean far off on the shore. Then he heard a motor, faintly at first, then getting louder. He got in and closed the door. Wouk looked at him. He nodded. Everything was white and ghostly in the reflection of the snow.

The headlights of the on-coming car lit the wide road. Wouk wound down the off-side window, took a deep breath and got out with the bag. Kline ran the motor. The car slowed and swung on to the driveway to the house. The driveways of both houses ran on to the road at the same easy angle. Wouk climbed on the running-board, his left arm through the open window, holding himself tightly to the car, the bag in his right hand. The car stopped outside the house.

They went off with a roar and spurting of gravel and snow. Wouk almost lost his foothold when they hit the crown of the road. The wind whipped tears into his eyes. They were roaring up the driveway and the slipstream tearing at his clothes. Suddenly Kline put the headlights on and they saw the big red car with Gessler this side of it, white-faced in the bright light; now Cohn getting out. When they were almost on them Gessler dived over the motor and brought Cohn down. Wouk tossed the bag as they went past. Vaguely he saw it skid across the roof of the car. Nothing happened. They were roaring down the other arm of the drive now, the car slewing wildly and Kline fighting it. Suddenly the whole front of the house erupted in brilliant orange-yellow flame. Wouk felt the blast of warm air hit him as he now hung on with both hands. Kline had her going again, then she side-slipped and the tail hit the stone pillar the bottom of the driveway.

Wouk lay on his back in the snow and the rear wheels racing close by his head. He was deaf and without feeling. The car inclined ahead. He forced himself up and grabbed

in the open window, his head flat on the roof. The car was moving now. He couldn't get his feet on the running-board. Something whanged loudly alongside him and hit cellulose in his face.

'Jesus Christ they're shooting at us!' he yelled and not hearing himself yell. Then the car was out on the road, him fumbling with the inside handle and his feet dragging. 'Let me in! Kline! For Christsake let me in!' He had his head in the window now. Kline grabbed his coat collar and held him till they reached the carriageway junction.

THEY CAUGHT A TAXI from the river and had it set them down about a half mile from the Ecuador. Then they started walking. It was snowing heavily again. They walked with their heads down against the falling snow. One wore a hat. The other walked very awkwardly. Wouk was talking to himself, looking back over his shoulder, then talking some more.

'Can't you shut up?' Kline said.

'Don't tell me to shut up. I can talk all I want. I got plenty to talk about.'

'Then don't talk so loud.'

They went on walking, Wouk walking very awkwardly.

Scheff came down to let them in. All the club was in darkness.

'How did it go?'

'It went off all right to me,' said Kline. 'Any visitors?'

'Not yet. Come on up.' Scheff led the way.

Suddenly there was a loud crash and something falling over.



'Good Jesus Christ!' Wouk yelled.

'Now what?' Kline said.

'I broke my leg. It's broke. I feel it.'

'Shut up,' said Scheff. 'You'll wake the whole street.'

Kline found him on the floor wrapped in foliage. They went upstairs with Wouk leaning on Kline.

Kruft was sitting at the desk with a hand of cards when they came in. He took one look at Wouk and doubled up. Scheff looked at him, then at Wouk, then saw his feet. Wouk didn't wear any shoes and his toes protruded from his socks.

'Shut up!' Wouk yelled.

Kline jumped in front of Kruft as Wouk got the Astra out.

'Get out the way!' Wouk brandishing the gun at Kline.

'Put it away,' said Kline.

Wouk didn't move any.

'You heard him,' said Scheff.

Kruft had long stopped laughing and was down behind the desk.

'Tell that ape he laugh once more he gets his head blowed off.' Wouk looked plenty tough even in his socks.

'He heard you. Now put it away,' said Scheff. Then to Kline. 'What the hell's all this? You pass yourselves off as hired guns and you turn up here looking like a comedy act.'

'Well it got sort of involved, Nat.' Kline apologetically.

'Did it go off all right?'

'You can say that again,' said Wouk. 'It almost blowed the house down.'

Scheff brightened. 'What happened?'

'We got them as they came out the car outside the house.' Then Wouk pausing. 'Only it don't happen as I thought it would Gessler was with him, see. And s we come up the drive, Gessler took a fast one over the bonnet and grabbeu Cohn down. Then I throws the bag. Only it

skids off the roof of the car and must've landed on the front steps.'

'But you got them?' said Scheff, anxiously.

'Almost blowed the house down. Then we got stuck by the gate and somebody starts shooting at us. I can't figure that any.'

'That's right,' said Kline. 'One bullet come in the roof and out the side window by my head.'

Scheff put the back of his hand to his forehead.

'We done all we could, Nat,' said Kline.

'Forget it.' Then to Kruft, 'Put their coats in your office.'

Kruft took Kline's hat and both overcoats next door. Scheff slid open a panel in the wall to his wardrobe and handed Wouk a pair of shoes. Wouk sitting on the divan put them on, then stood up.

'Never mind if they fit,' said Scheff. 'As long as you're wearing them when our friends arrive.' Then he went across to the bar and brought two bottles and glasses to the desk.

In the middle of the second game the bell rang. Kruft went downstairs.

'Not you two again,' said Scheff as they came in.

'That's us,' said the long one. 'Always in business.'

'Then you found who burned the shop?' said Scheff, surprised.

'Don't kid us,' the blond one said.

'What do you mean?'

'Somebody just tossed a bomb at Cohn and Gessler,' the long one said.

'You don't say?' Scheff looked at Kline and he looked at Wouk, then they all looked at Kruft.

Kruft looked at the long one. 'Don't look at me. I've been here all night.'

'Yes,' said Scheff. 'We've been here all night. All of us.'

The blond one was looking at their footwear.

'Anybody get hurt?' Kline asked.

They were all looking at the long one.

'If the bomb had gone off when it hit the car they would. But it glanced off and landed down a basement.'

'Sorry there's no funeral, boys,' said the blond one watching their faces.

'Get lost,' said Scheff.

'Well as long as we know where you gentlemen have been all night we won't take up any more of your valuable time,' said the long one. And you could see he didn't believe any of it.

They watched them go out with Krufft, the blond one swaggering a little.

'Humph!' Scheff said when they were gone.

'It wasn't our fault, Nat,' said Kline.

'Go and jump in the river!'

'WELL WHAT DO YOU think of yourself now?' Scheff was sitting at his desk.

'I never think about it that way,' says Frankie, over by the window.

'How do you mean?' Scheff asked.

'Nothing.' Then looking squarely at Scheff, says: 'How much you think we can make after Shorr?'

'Have we suddenly gone money-hungry?'

'I was just thinking,' says Frankie, looking out the window.

'Well you'll make plenty on this one. I'll see to that. That's how sure I am. What do you say, Wally? It's robbery.'

'Yeah. It's robbery.' Lang was sitting on the divan, and looking at him you could see he was pretty drunk.

'What gces with you two?' Scheff getting out from

behind his desk and going across to Frankie. 'Come on, tell me. I fix you up with a short cut to the title and what do you act like? I'll tell you - pall-bearers.'

Lang got to his feet. 'Let's get going, Frankie. We better get packed if we're going out there today.'

Frankie came away from the window. He was thinking plenty about something.

'What's wrong?' Scheff asked. 'You look like women trouble.'

'You both look like women trouble,' Lang said.

Scheff ignored him. 'Out there it'll be different. You'll like it out there. I'll come out and see you before you come in.'

'Sure you will,' said Lang. And to Frankie: 'C'mon, champ.' The way he said it, he was plenty sore.

'See you out there, Mr. Scheff,' says Frankie, thinking he better say something bright.

'And don't worry about anything. Don't worry about the odds either. You'll beat him. Our money says you do.'

They went on downstairs.

Outside on the street, Lang said. 'I'll see you at the station, kid.'

'Where you going?'

Lang winked. 'See a man about a dog.'

'Don't you think you best lay off a while?'

'I'm all right. See you at the station.' He went on down the street toward the Condor Club. The way he held himself you could tell he was pretty drunk all right.

Frankie waved a taxi out from the rank beyond the Belvidere and went back to pick up his bags. On the way he thought about how things were going. They were going plenty fast. Scheff could see it before anybody else. A few more months and you could blow. You could blow anyway if Shorr won. Maybe you would have to use her money after all. Helen didn't worry about that. She wanted it now. Hell, you couldn't do it now. Not that way. You could blow when you were in the money.

Everything suddenly was money. Life was getting complicated. You could feel it. And Scheff. Scheff was pretty smart. Cohn found that out. Scheff was smart all right. You got thinking something somewhere was not all it should be. You could feel that too.

He picked up his bags and took the taxi back up town. On the way up he didn't think any. He sat back in the seat and looked out the windows. The sky was clear blue and the sun hard and cold and new. You could see the first touches of early Spring on the trees either side of the uptown streets, tiny pale green shoots on the black branches, some shoots white as with frost, and that feeling in the cold air and things waking up in the hard new sunlight. It showed in the people out walking too. Most of all you could feel it.

HE LEFT THE BAGS with the porter and walked up the stairs. She opened the door soon as he knocked. She wore a brushed wool sweater and tweed skirt. It always embarrassed him when she looked at him first off. She hadn't said anything and he went in and says : 'I just come by before I go away.'

'Is something wrong?' Still standing looking at him.

'No. Scheff called Lang at the gym this morning and said it best we went out to Kosanta and finish training.'

The disappointment showed in her face.

'I got be back in town the twenty-third,' he went on.

'That's three whole weeks, Frankie,' she said, close to him and pouting.

'That in't long,' he says. 'That's only three weeks.' That was how she worked on him.

'I'll drive out and see you.'

'I don't know. Lang might not like it.'

'I must see you, darling.'

'Sure. Maybe I can fix it. But it's only three weeks.'

'I don't want you to go.' She looked up at him. The way she looked at him hit him low in the belly. He kissed her. She trembled with it.

He came away from her. 'I got to go now, Helen. Lang's waiting for me.'

'Can't you stay a little while?'

'I love you, Helen,' says Frankie, trying to side-track it.

'We could hurry it.' Her voice was far away.

'No. I got to go.' He didn't look at her. It was all right her talking that way in the dark but in daytime it showed on her face too. Maybe after a while it would be all right in the daytime too.

'Just a little while?'

'I can't. Lang's waiting for me.' He started toward the door.

She went after him. 'Then you'll call me?'

'Sure,' he says. 'I'll call you.'

'Every day?'

'Sure, every day.' He kissed her quickly and went down the hall. She stood in the doorway watching him, and with that empty feeling already.

IT WAS ALMOST time for the train to leave when Lang arrived.

'Glad you made it,' said Lang coming up to Frankie and searching the pockets of his coat for the tickets. He was drunker now than ever.

Frankie followed him on to the train. The train started as they went along the corridor. Frankie stopped outside a compartment occupied by an old woman and two dogs. The dogs were lying on the seat alongside her.

'No,' said Lang. 'Can't stand old women. Can't stand dogs either. Old women and dogs are real.'

They found an empty compartment in the next carriage. The train was out in the suburbs. They sat facing each other in corner seats by the window. The train ran along a high embankment. Below them were houses, clean and neat in the late sun. The sunlight was glinting on the windows and throwing sharp black shadows of the houses out on to the roadways. The sky was pale blue and clean-looking and the evening frost coming down.

'Say good-bye to the woman?' said Lang, suddenly.

'What you talking 'bout?'

'I know what I'm talking about.'

Frankie looked out the window.

'All right. Don't tell me. Don't want to know. Don't want to know anything. Innocent, that's me.' He brought a half-bottle out from his inside coat pocket. 'Want a drink?'

'No thanks.'

'Sure?'

'I told you.'

'All right. But don't be that way. I'm the only one who can be that way. I'm clean. I haven't got any women. I'm just a victim of circumstance. You're a victim of circumstance too, but that's different. Three shovelfuls and you're a long time gone. Could go tonight. Could go tomorrow. Could go any time. Never make plans. That's me. Never make plans, kid. You'll find somebody else always makes the plans for you. A disillusioned victim of circumstance. That's me, boy.' He drank from the bottle.

'What's this all 'bout?' says Frankie, lost in it all.

'Have a drink.'

'No thanks.'

Lang put the bottle away. 'Wake me when we get there, boy.'

'What's on your mind, Lang?'

'Nothing's on my mind. Haven't got any mind.' He was settled back in the corner, hat over his eyes.

The train went very quickly, carriages swaying slightly, wheels clicking and smoke blowing back along the train from the engine. The last of the sun had gone out of the sky, and the sky growing dark but still clear, frosty clear; and the land shadowed and losing shape in the growing dark. Lights shone from the windows of buildings and you could not see what sort of buildings they really were, but you expected them to be farms and outhouses, and only very occasionally did you pass lights close to the track. Now sparks blew in the smoke in the dark as the train went very quickly along in the night.

Frankie put the roof light on as the train slowed. The station was long, low-roofed and poorly lit. Somebody walked back along the train calling: 'Kosanta Beach Junction! Kosanta Beach Junction!'

He woke Lang. Lang pushed his hat back and squinted out the window. Frankie got the bags down from the rack. Lang felt bad now. It showed on his face. They got down off the train as the guard blew his whistle and signalled the engine with the lantern. They walked up the platform as the train went out, warm white steam yellowed by the lights blowing in under the low roof.

Coming out of the station they saw the small town of Kosanta with its high old-fashioned houses and everything quiet and no traffic moving in the square outside the station. The air was sharp and frost sparkling on the ground under the arc-lights. Frankie followed Lang across the square to where a red neon sign shone: C A F É, over a lighted window.

'Where's the hotel?' Frankie asked.

'It's outside town. Down on the beach,' Lang told him.

A number of cars were parked out front of the café. They went inside. It was warm and smelled of coffee and



frying bacon. Two men wearing unbuttoned overcoats sat playing cards at a table in the first booth. A middle-aged woman came out through a printed screen drying her hands on a dishtowel.

'Coffee,' Lang said. 'One black, one white. No sugar in either.'

The two men went on playing cards. Both had the collars of their overcoats turned up. When the woman brought the coffee, Lang said : 'Anywhere we can get a taxi?'

The woman looked across at the two men playing cards. 'Max. Fellow here wants a taxi.'

'Where to, mister?' the round-faced one asked.

'Dubuque's place.'

'Sure. When you're ready,' said Max, and went back to the card game.

'Nice place,' says Frankie.

'Helluva nice place,' agreed Lang.

The woman had gone out the back again.

They finished the coffee and the one called Max went out to the taxi with them, their breath blowing white in the night air. Max turned the high old saloon around in the square and headed out the shore road. The town of Kosanta ended almost right behind the square. Most of it was villas and rebuilt old houses of the Twenties. New villas had been built out along the shore road facing the ocean. Max didn't hurry any. The headlights lit up the white-frosted roadway. He had the side window down and the air blew in cold and sharp and carrying the smell of the ocean. Occasionally on the right-hand side of the road a sand-dune showed in the headlights above the macadam. Sea grass grey close to the roadway.

'Say,' Max said into the rear-view driving mirror. 'Haven't I seen you out here before - say, four or five years back?'

'Could be,' said Lang.

'Weren't you out here the same time as that bum Hackmer?'

'Can't you step it up a little?' Lang asked.

'The road's real bad tonight, mister. I don't want to lose this heap. It's all I've got. You don't make much out here till the summer tourists start. I lost plenty on that Hackmer.' Then into the mirror. 'You a fighter too, kid?'

'That's right,' said Lang. 'He's a fighter.'

'Then I hope you're a better fighter than Hackmer was. I lost plenty on that bum.'

They drove the rest of the way in silence.

The Kosanta Beach Hotel stood on a rise of ground back off the road and behind a screen of pine trees. It was one of those old-fashioned houses that had been rebuilt. Max stopped the car on the loose gravel driveway outside the door. It was very quiet and most of the lights out. There was nobody behind the reception desk in the hall. The hall smelled of fresh varnish and new carpeting.

'Beats me why we got to come out here,' says Frankie.

'Everybody comes out here before a big one,' Lang told him. Lang had a breath that would fade wallpaper. He saw the bell on the desk and rang it. 'Where the hell's Dubuque?' Then he went around behind the desk to the door.

'Somebody ring the bell?'

'Dubuque?' Lang called, coming out from behind the desk.

'Yes. Yes, Dubuque.' Dubuque came downstairs in his shirt-sleeves. He was a short wiry man with greying hair and continental moustaches. 'Oh, I am most sorry,' he said, smiling. 'I just been fix your rooms.' He shook hands with Lang, then Frankie. 'This our boy?'

'Frankie Gallagher,' said Lang.

'Pleased to meet you,' Dubuque said.

'Sure', says Frankie.

'How are you both?'

'Dreadful,' Lang said. 'Still got the bar?'

'In the winter she's closed. But you can have anything

you want. You see, only in the winter comes a few fighters.'

'You can bring a couple of beers to the room. That'll be fine.'

'And supper? Supper is at eight.'

'Anybody else here?' Lang asked.

'There's the Hennig party. They've been here six weeks. They leave tomorrow.'

'Then we'll eat in my room.'

'Certainly. I give you two rooms the front of the house.' Dubuque showed them upstairs. The rooms had an adjoining door. All of the house was modernized since Lang had been there with Hackmer. 'Maybe you would like to eat now?' Dubuque asked.

'Sure,' Lang said. 'That'll be fine.'

Dubuque left to arrange supper.

'Say,' Frankie says. 'Why don't we eat downstairs?'

Lang looked at him. 'No reason. Why? I just thought we should keep to ourselves. When you climb aboard with Shorr I want you fitter than you've ever been. All right?'

'I just wondered.'

'The next three weeks you do as I say. No questions asked. We go on the road half-past five tomorrow. Remember me to ask Dubuque about a cycle.' Lang went through to his room. Frankie began unpacking, putting everything away in the drawers of the tallboy except the heavy work clothes, and folding them across the back of the chair by the bed. Then Dubuque brought supper.

WHEN THE ALARM went off it was still dark. not the night-dark but the false dawn. The sky was clear as glass and

the stars bright in the cold light above the horizon. He sat on the edge of the bed and pulled on the long woollen underwear. It was uncomfortable and damp-feeling. He swore to himself. Next he pulled on the heavy police trousers over the underwear. Afterward, two sweaters, one crew-necked and the other high-collared with a zip down the front. Then he put on the blue sailcloth wind-jammer with knitted collar and cuffs. Lang came in while he tied the heavy road-shoes.

'Meet me out front when you're ready. I'll get the cycle.'

Frankie finished dressing and went out to the bathroom, found the glass, turned on the hot water tap, and after letting it run, drank half a glass of the hot water. Back in the room he lowered the window, feeling the freezing cold air hit the inside of his lungs, and smelling the salt cleanly off the ocean; the ocean dark and far out on the flat sandy shore and the line of surf very white against the darkness of the water. The pine trees along the shore road were black against it all and not moving in the early morning.

Lang waited for him out front with the bicycle. He wore an old woollen cap pulled down over his ears, and over the rest of his clothes his heavy overcoat.

'All right,' said Lang, mounting the bicycle and then starting down the loose gravel driveway. Frankie turned on to the road and started along it at an easy trot. The road was white with frost and ice on the pools close into the sides. The grass was white too, and with no breeze. His heavy shoes rang out loud on the macadam. He could feel the cold hit the bottom of his lungs every time he breathed, and his breath blowing out white as smoke. The false dawn had died now and everything was spooky and dead-looking with the white frost.

'Okay. Open it up,' called Lang, and Frankie hearing him step on the pedals and the bicycle creaking and the tyres running crisply on the frost. Frankie opened the pace, keeping to the crown of the road and watching for

ice. He could feel the sweat begin to come out between his shoulders. The only thing cold was his face and ears. He held the pace three minutes, then Lang called : 'Okay. Slow it.'

Now he felt his face and ears begin to warm. He spat a couple of times to get rid of that stringy feeling the back of his throat. Lang came alongside of him on the bicycle. He wore his wristwatch on the inside of his wrist and kept note of the time without letting go the handle-bars.

There was nothing along that part of the road except tall brown sea grass and some low trees back off the road on the left. Now the dawn was really coming in, the stars fading and out on the horizon above the grey ocean the first light of the sun but the sun not yet risen.

Next time they slowed, Lang said : 'Want to give me the coat?'

Frankie unbuttoned the windjammer and Lang took it, draped it around his neck and tied the arms, all with one hand.

'How far we going?'

'We were doing seven in town. I thought nine, maybe ten. By the time we get back in town it'll be a dozen.'

Next time they opened up, Frankie waved Lang on in front to set the pace. They didn't meet anybody the whole way out. The sun came up big and slow and fiery red. There were no clouds in the sky, and with the sun risen the ocean seemed a little warmer-looking too.

That was how it went, trotting and running, Lang setting the pace and keeping time, and with Frankie's windjammer and high-collared sweater around his neck. Lang had a sweat on too in the last stretch. Then they met Hennig and his two sparring partners, Hennig out front, both boys lagging some. One of the boys was a nigger.

'You're up early, kid,' Hennig called as they closed.

'Don't worry 'bout me,' says Frankie.

'Step it out,' Lang said, eyes straight ahead.

Frankie saw Hennig look at Lang, then nod, grinning all the while. The other two went past, one raising his arm, and the nigger smiling so his teeth showed.

BACK IN THE ROOM he closed the window, smoothed the bedclothes up and lay down. He lay there just breathing and sweating, not thinking about anything, and only hearing his heart beat. Lang came in with the wind-jammer and sweater. 'How do you feel?' he asked.

'Okay. Fine'.

'You're looking all right. By the time we're through out here you'll be in great shape.'

Frankie lay on the bed. 'What's Hennig doing here?'

'He meets Rosanne Friday night.'

'Think he's going to win?'

'Sure he'll win.'

'Then if Shorr beats me he in't going to fight Rosanne,' says Frankie. 'Rossane's number three.'

'Don't talk that way. I'll go down and get the tea.' He stopped by the door. 'Don't ever think about getting beat. Put Shorr away and he's got to put the title up. Think about that.'

When Lang brought the tea Frankie had cooled off but still lay on the bed.

'When you're through take a shower,' said Lang. 'Breakfast will be right up. I'll call you.' Lang suddenly had a way of looking at the wall when he talked. Then he went through to his room. Frankie sipped the tea, then climbed out of the work clothes. When he went out to shower he saw Lang through the part open door sitting on his bed with a bottle. He went on out and took the shower.

When he came out the bathroom, Dubuque was coming along the hall carrying a breakfast tray. Frankie, with a towel around his waist, beckoned to him. Dubuque came past the door to Lang's room. 'Yes,' he said. 'Something is wrong?'

'Nothing wrong, Mr. Dubuque. I think maybe you could tell me something.'

Dubuque smiled. 'Ah, I think something is wrong.' There was garlic on his breath.

'You don't tell anybody I ask?'

'No, no, no.' He shook his head so the crockery rattled under the napkin.

'There any calls for Lang last night?'

'No. No calls for anybody last night.'

Frankie eyed him slowly. 'Sure?'

'Yes,' Dubuque said. 'Sure I'm sure. Only Mr. Lang couldn't sleep and came down for a bottle.' He watched Frankie's face carefully. 'Is that bad?'

'Don't know,' says Frankie. 'What you think?'

Dubuque shrugged. 'Last time Mr. Lang was here he not able sleep either. Not with that boy Hackmer here. It was bad. He drink too. I never see so much drinking before a fight. Such a bad fight too. Hackmer was a bad boy. Not like you, huh?' Frankie didn't say anything.

'Now you go and dress like a good boy.' Dubuque went on.

Frankie went in and dressed, then put the work clothes over the radiator.

Lang was standing at the window watching the ocean break on the shore. The table was set in middle of the room. Frankie coughed. It startled Lang. He turned away from the window. 'Go ahead,' he said, indicating the table.

Frankie took a chair. 'In't you eating?' he asked.

Lang was back at the window. 'Nothing for me. My insides aren't so good today. One of those perforated ulcers. You go right ahead. I'll have some coffee later.'

Frankie left him with himself and the ocean through a window.

The orange juice was thick and cold and unsweetened. There was a banana with cream, then two soft-boiled eggs, and toast and coffee. All the while Frankie ate, Lang looked out the window.

'Feeling any better?' Frankie says, after a while.

'Sure. I'll be all right in no time. Do you want to go out and take a walk? You can have a look at the gym. It's that new annexe out the back. Last time it was a cedarwood shed. Dubuque's come on plenty since then though.'

Frankie got his legs out from under the table. 'Sure there's nothing bothering you?'

'I told you what was bothering me,' said Lang, his voice rising. 'What's wrong with you?'

'I just think you not yourself. All right?'

Lang hesitated. 'I'm sorry, kid. Forget it. I'll see you in the gym.'

Frankie walked to the door.

'Oh, before I forget,' Lang called after him. 'Charley and Gunner Moore will be out today.'

'Moore?' Frankie says. 'What's wrong with Peralta? I been working with him the past six weeks.'

'Well we've got Moore now,' Lang said.

'I think he was finished,' says Frankie.

'Maybe he's not so fast anymore but he's got all the angles. He fought Shorr twice. He's the same type of fighter too.' Lang had got the habit of looking at the wall while he talked.

'Suit yourself,' says Frankie, leaving Lang back at the window.



HE WENT IN the side exit of the annexe. It was all gym, with a polished parquet floor and the ring up the far end away from the doors. A single row of wooden folding-chairs were set around the ring. Along the wall where the side exit was were wall-bars eight feet tall. Along the other wall, starting by the doors, was the speed bag and two light-heavy bags, and the heavy bag hung by chains fixed to a steel plate in the ceiling. The door to the dressing-room and showers was by the main doors opening into the hotel. A carpeted hallway led from the annexe to the reception hall.

Frankie was by the ring when somebody hit the speed bag and it went off rackety-rack against the shield. Hennig grinned. 'How are you, Frankie?'

'Fine. Yourself?'

'Right on top.' Hennig wore a dark blue suit and dark tie with a white shirt. The suit made him look bulky about the shoulders and chest. He had his hair cut so close to the sides of his head it might have been shaved.

'What time you going in?'

Hennig came up to him. 'Oh, no hurry. You've got to give Malone time to digest his breakfast. The fight's made at three o'clock.'

'Good luck,' says Frankie.

'Thanks.' He put his hands in the pockets of his trousers and walked around the other side of the ring. 'Just you and Lang here?' he asked.

'Charley and Gunner Moore are coming out.'

'Moore, huh?' Then Hennig came back around the ring. 'Look, kid. I don't know how much you know about

the company you're in, but watch it. I know it's none my business but somehow I don't think you know very much. You look after yourself good.'

'You mean Lang?'

'Lang's nothing. He thinks plenty of you. Anybody can see that. And he was good once. Maybe he still is. But it was a close thing with Hackmer. He was out of it two years after Hackmer took a dive.'

'You know who owned Hackmer?' says Frankie, thinking plenty fast.

Hennig shook his head. 'Nobody knew. Everything was fixed before the enquiry. But my guess it was Scheff.'

'What 'bout Volek?' says Frankie, really thinking now. 'Scheff told me he got ten per cent.'

'Well, who knows. Scheff's got his finger in plenty. But O'Dowd's been around Volek since I remember. Mostly he fights out of town. But tell me, kid.' All the time watching Frankie's face. 'How come you get fixed up with Shorr? I've never known him stick his neck out.'

'All I know is Scheff suddenly tells me I fight Shorr. I beat him he puts the title up.'

'Did he tell you there's no rule says if you beat him he gives you a return? He could duck you for ever. I've been leading contender two years and he's never fought me. Sure, he's got to put the title up now but he still hasn't said whether it's me or Volek. Volek wouldn't meet me either. That's why I meet Rosanne. If I beat him it's got to be me or Volek. If the Commission had nominated me it would have been different. But who knows?'

Frankie didn't say anything.

'Don't worry none. You might beat us all to it yet. Maybe he'll give you the shot after this one. It wouldn't surprise me any. Shorr isn't what he used to be. All he's looking for now is money. You two might make plenty in a title bout. But if it comes out that way do me a favour. Let me have the first shot. I can't go on much longer, and it would be a nice way to go out.'

'You kidding,' says Frankie.

'I'm kidding nobody,' Hennig said. 'That's what puzzles me with Shorr. He's always been careful, and the way you punch he's liable to go out in a box. That doesn't fit,' said Hennig, slowly shaking his head.

The main doors opened from the hotel. 'What's going on?' said Lang, seeing them.

'Look after yourself, kid,' Hennig said, then went across to the heavy bag and picked up a pair of punching gloves. Lang was with Frankie.

'See you around,' said Hennig. 'You too, Lang.'

They watched him walk back down the gym carrying the gloves, wide-shouldered and bulky-looking in his dark suit.

'What was he talking about?'

'He come in get his gloves,' says Frankie.

Lang didn't say anything but you could see his mind turning over. That was how it was with Lang now. Somehow he had plenty to think about.

HENNIG AND HIS CAMP left about mid-morning. After the morning work-out, Frankie and Lang went in to eat in the dining-room. Chairs were stacked on all the tables except one over by the french windows. Dubuque's wife brought lunch. She was bigger than Dubuque, Nordic-looking, and with greying blonde hair. She smiled plenty but never said much, and maybe it because she felt the way about her size all big women feel in the company of men.

While they were eating, Charley and Gunner Moore arrived from town in the high old saloon with Max. Dubuque's wife came in and set another two places.

Frankie got up as they came in. Charley had on his brown suit with the cuffs showing wear.

Glancing around the dining room, he said. 'How 'bout this? Maybe we should hired monkey-suits.'

Moore wore a grey double breasted suit and carried a black homberg. He was a serious-looking boy with a lot of weight around his middle. His coat was buttoned tight and he looked more like a heavyweight than anything else. He stood inside the door, the blackest nigger you ever saw.

'Come on in,' says Frankie.

He walked slowly across to the table. 'Pleased meet you, Mr. Gallagher.'

'Sure. Sit down.'

They all sat at the table. Dubuque brought in lunch for them. Lang hadn't said anything. Charley looked at him across the table, then at Frankie. Frankie moved his head slightly. Charley went back to the steak.

Lang finished eating, and said to Frankie : 'You can go up and lay down when you've eaten. I'll call you for the afternoon session.' Then to Moore : 'You ready for work?'

'Yes, sir. You want to work today?'

'I wanted Frankie to have a couple of rounds. You can have it easy.'

Moore grinned. 'Okay with me, Mr. Lang.'

Lang got up and went out.

'What eating him?' said Charley, looking at Frankie.

'Ulcers. He's got that wrong with him for a start.'

'He sure give us a big welcome,' Moore said. 'If things been better I sure don't work for Lang any.'

'I thought it was him who fixed it for you to come out here,' says Frankie.

'No. Was Scheff.' Then looking at them with those big nigger eyes. 'Sure, I know what you thinking. I'm a has-been. I know it. But things don't come easy working the gyms.'

'That's got nothing to do with it,' says Frankie. 'I'm just wondering how you got in the act.'

'Something wrong?' Charley asked.

'How do I know? Something just don't feel right.'

'I know nothing,' said Moore. 'All I know is I'm getting paid.'

'Forget it,' Frankie says, getting to his feet. 'See you in the gym.'

They went back to eating, the sun coming in the window and it was warm inside in the sun.

THEY WERE ALL OUT in the gym. Frankie was on the speed bag. Moore was skipping rope. He was plenty thick through the middle. Last time he fought was a six-rounder on an out-of-town card. Weight had always bothered him. Had he carried any punch at all he would probably have been a light-heavy. Frankie took the punching gloves off and got his cup and headgear.

'All right, Moore?' called Lang, waiting by the ring.

'Yes, sir,' said Moore, then going over to the bench for his cup.

Charley had the gloves laced on Frankie. Frankie climbed in the ring while Charley went to work on Moore.

'I want you to fight your own fight,' Lang told Moore. 'If I want you to change anything I'll tell you.'

Moore nodded, then climbed in the ring, looking out-size in the headgear. Lang climbed up on the apron, towel over his shoulder, and smeared jelly on Frankie's face.

'Moore'll fight his own fight. I want you to go in. Take him on the inside.'

'He going to be all right?' says Frankie looking across at Moore.

'Let him take care of himself. It was weight that beat Moore. If they had let him fight Shorr at one hundred and seventy-five he would have won. I've seen him come out a sweat-box before a weigh-in so he couldn't stay on his feet. Moore's all right. Take him on the inside. And remember—Shorr don't punch any harder than he does.'

Frankie nodded, putting the mouthpiece in and rubbing his shoes in the resin.

'Time!' Lang called, starting the watch.

Moore came out with his hands up high and looking out the tops of his eyes. Frankie dropped his chin on his chest and went in and let go both hands to the body. Moore half smothered it, then got the left up in Frankie's face. That didn't bother Frankie any and he hooked again with both hands. The right buried itself in Moore's middle. He didn't like it any. Some hooker, Frankie. Moore came back with the left in Frankie's face, but you could see he wasn't any too keen on it. This leaving his belly open had him plenty worried. Frankie got home his own left. Moore's mouthpiece almost came out. Frankie cracked the right over to the head. You could see it shake Moore in his shoes. Then Frankie hit another couple shots to the belly. All Moore wanted to do was stop them. Frankie could hand it out all right. Only thing Moore did was throw the right a few times on the retreat and Frankie would take it high on the head or shoulder. Nothing bothered Frankie. Only thing bothers a hooker is another hooker. Then Frankie landed a left to the head that made Moore grab the ropes.

'Time!' Lang yelled. Lang looked plenty happy.

Charley was across in Moore's corner. Frankie thumbed the mouthpiece out. Lang lifted the bottle.

'No,' says Frankie, waving away the bottle.

'How do you find it?'

'Maybe he don't know how to come forward but he knows how to go back all right.'

'Shorr's a lot faster. You've got to stay with him. If you start to tire that's when they take over. You've got

to be able to keep that up all the time. Do that and Shorr'll start to go around the eighth.'

When Lang called, 'Time', on the second, nobody was more happy than Moore. The way he climbed out the ring you knew he knew all about it. Frankie finished the session with the heavy bag, Lang watching him closely all the while he worked.

Frankie took the punching gloves off and Lang put his hand on his shoulder. Lang looked as if he was going to say something but didn't quite know how to say it. Frankie just looked at him.

Then Lang said : 'You're a good one, Frankie. The best. I want you to know that.' His face was sad and his eyes maybe a little wet.

Frankie watched him walk on back down the gym and through the doors to the hotel.

'Hey, champ!' called Charley. 'How 'bout that shower?'

'Sure,' says Frankie. 'Right with you.'

When he went into the dressing-room, Moore was sat on the bench tying his shoes. 'Man-oh-man,' he said. 'Where you learn to punch like that?'

Frankie smiled, his mind still on Lang.

Moore laughed. 'Old Shorr is going have himself some surprise. Man, I'm not fooling.'

Then getting to his feet, suddenly serious. 'You know, there's something bothers me. I can't figure why Shorr suddenly risks getting his head blowed off by an unknown. Know what I mean? I know Shorr all right. I tell you I can't figure it any. No, sir.'

Charley came in with the tea. Frankie climbed on the rubbing-table. Moore joined him. They sat sipping the hot tea. Charley collected Frankie's mouthpiece and put it in the jar.

'Mr. Gallagher !' called somebody out in the gym. 'Mr. Gallagher !'

'Dubuque,' said Charley.

Frankie put his head out the door.

'Call for you, Mr. Gallagher,' Dubuque said.

Frankie followed him through to the booth in the front lobby. Lang was standing by the desk. Frankie took the call. When he came out the booth, Lang said : 'That the Guerrera woman?'

Frankie looked at him. 'That's all right, in't it?'

'Tell her lay off, huh? Tell her after the fight. You can see her then.'

'It in't doing any harm,' says Frankie.

'Look, I got enough troubles without woman troubles. Tell her after the fight.'

'Something's maybe bothering you but it in't her,' says Frankie.

Lang hesitated, then relaxed, putting his hand on Frankie's shoulder. 'You've got it wrong, Frankie. It's a touch of the nerves. That's what it is. Listen, I want you to win this fight. You know that, don't you? I don't want to take any chances. Scheff finds out you're tied up with her there's all hell to pay. I'm telling you. I know.'

'Scheff don't own her,' says Frankie.

Lang looked at him, then said : 'All right. Any woman. All right?'

Frankie rubbed a hand across his eyes. 'Okay, okay. I'll tell her. I'll tell her she don't come out either.'

'What!' said Lang. 'Are you out of your head? What if Scheff turned up and she was out here? Jesus Christ!'

'What the hell you yelling 'bout?' says Frankie, dumb to it all. 'I begin to think I'm bugged the way everybody's going on.'

'You can't bring her out here. Promise me you don't bring her out here. What you do later I don't care. But not out here.'

'All right, all right! Shut up!' says Frankie, yelling.

Lang quietened. 'Just don't bring her out here, huh?'

Frankie watched him go upstairs. Something was plenty wrong. It stank the house out. Lang was on the roof with the pigeons. He had it plenty bad. It showed all over



him. Sure, all right, thought Frankie. All right.

Back in the dressing-room Charley and Moore were waiting for him.

'No good news, huh?' said Charley, seeing his face as he came in.

'The news is all right,' says Frankie, 'but Lang says she don't come out here.'

'Never mind, it's only another two weeks.'

'Yeah, yeah, I know. But don't you give me that.'

'I don't mean nothing,' said Charley, quickly. 'That just me and my big mouth.'

Frankie started undressing. 'Forget it. I don't mean it that way.' He went through to the shower.

'Hey,' Charley called after him. 'You going watch television tonight? The Hennig-Rosanne one is on.'

'Sure. But first I got call Helen tell her she don't come out.' He adjusted the taps and stepped under the shower.

Charley looked at Moore and shrugged. Moore didn't say anything. They went out and Charley closed the door behind them.

THE CALL TOOK HER very much by surprise, and left her sick and empty-feeling.

No. No, he didn't. He did. He said he didn't want me out there. He said it was Lang. But it's Lang who doesn't want Nate to know anything. Poor boy, maybe I should have told him. No, don't be silly. You couldn't tell him that. He'd never understand. I couldn't ask him to. Why is everything so complicated? All week it's been hell. Yes it has. It's been awful. And another fortnight of it. I can't do it. I can't. I'm sorry, Frankie. I can't. Poor

lovely boy, you don't understand. Oh, darling, darling sweet one. I can't. I looked forward to it so much. Mustn't sit here and think about it though. It'll drive me mad.

She rose from the divan and went to the cocktail cabinet, found the Cognac, and poured a glass full. She brought it back and sat down.

Mustn't think about it. No, mustn't – oh hell, what's the good? Of course I'll think about it. I'll think about it whether I want to or not.

She sipped the Cognac slowly, sitting with her legs under her, the skirt drawn high and taut across her thighs.

I wish we could have managed even for an hour. All I wanted was to see him. And that. It would have been lovely. He's lovely. He's such a lovely boy. I do love him so. He's beautiful. All of him. He's so big. Really, he's so big. It's funny how you can do it with anyone, but of them all it was him. I can see him. I can feel all of me going around inside again. High up. No I can't. Yes I can. Really I can. I can feel it. There. There. There. He's so wonderfully big. He's the biggest there ever was. No, yes. Jon wasn't that big. Remember that time out on the beach? And afterward the sand in it. Who would have believed that? There's that awful story about that too. My God, another whole two weeks. I can't. I can't possibly. I can't even try. Of course you can try. No I can't. You know that. That other wouldn't be like him anyway.

She brought her legs from under her, then sitting back, studied them carefully. She wore dark diamond-mesh stockings. The Cognac glass was empty.

Mustn't do that. Don't think about it. No. No don't do that. Just a little? It's not harmful. Not really. Just a little? It's nice. He's nice. He's wonderful. It's him. Yes, it's him. Not me. It's him, it's him. Yes it is. Oh hell, I can't. I can't even do that now.

She rose and filled the glass again with Cognac, then raising it to her nose, smelled the aroma.

I'll go out. That's what I'll do. I'll go out. No one will know. I wish I had been working tonight. I can't go and see Nate. I don't want Nate. No, not Nate.

She drank the Cognac hastily. It burned all the way down. She coughed and felt sweat prickle her forehead.

I could go down to the Island. Remember that night? You were so awfully drunk. And the old man with the beard? Remember what he said as you went past? And how his face fell apart when *you* asked him? And that room over the pet shop? Everything smelling of dogs and rabbits and birds. And you did that? And he said he'd always wanted that done. And he couldn't do anything afterward and you did that with him watching. Remember? Remember that?

She set the glass down, and standing there, pulled the sweater up over her head and dropped it on the divan. She fumbled with both hands behind her back, unhooked the nylon lace brassière, slid the straps down her arms and let it fall. The immense brown nipples breasts quivered with the movement of unzipping her skirt and removing the belt and stockings. Then putting the shoes back on and feeling the cool air on her nakedness she walked slowly upstairs.

She dried before the full-length wall-mirror in the bedroom, watching every movement of her body. Then she dusted herself with talcum, gently smoothing it in, and put perfume behind her ears, then very carefully between her breasts and thighs, pausing, staring at herself in the mirror, then suddenly splashing the perfume directly from the bottle on to her stomach. She drew a sharp breath with the coldness of it, stopping it from running with the palm of her hand.

She sat on the bed naked and lit a cigarette, seeing the cigarette tremble slightly between her moist fingers. She did not think now. She sat on the bed smcking and cooling and the green satin cover cold and smooth under her. The clothes were laid out on the bed. Rubbing the cigarette out on the ashtray, she started to dress.

First she put on the sheer black brassière, then the tiny black nylon crepe panties. She picked up the belt, started to put it around her, then changed her mind and returned it to the drawer of the dressing-table along with the stockings. From the wardrobe she chose an oatmeal-coloured knit dress with a long zip in the back. The dress clung tightly to her body, the breasts seeming unbelievably larger and the nipples showing round and hard under the tight smooth wool. She turned her back to the mirror and the thin elastic bands of the panties were faintly outlined high over her hips. She smiled in the mirror, then smoothed the dress down over her hips with both hands so each hip appeared round and solid and separate, the thin bands of elastic showing plainly under the wool. Turning sideways she inspected herself again, posing her long bare legs, palm of her left hand pressed flat to her stomach. She smiled again, slowly turning around, admiring herself, the left hand pressed flat to her stomach.

Aren't I beautiful? You're beautiful, darling. Don't you want me? Of course I want you, darling. Don't . . . Please don't. It's naughty. You're such a naughty girl. Oh, you are. Can't you wait, darling? Don't do that. No. Naughty. Don't do that. It'll be so uncomfortable afterward. And you bathed too. Now don't. All right. Wait. I can wait.

She hurried now, unpinning her hair, brushing it out, only slowing in her haste to apply the make-up.

She put the bag on the seat alongside of her, swung the car out from the rank and drove downtown. She felt excited, her hands trembling on the wheel. She put the car around the wide traffic island the end of the main thoroughfare and crossed the high-arched steel bridge on to the hill. Suddenly she realized she wasn't wearing a coat. She smiled to herself, driving slowly now, seeing the neon signs both sides of the wide hill, reading them, mentally discarding them; then the bright-lit windows of the Kosher Restaurant and people eating at the tables

behind the nylon curtains. Two doors further down was Milner's Hotel and Bar, the neon sign changing from green to red, then back.

The cocktail bar was on the first floor. There were high stools along the counter and half a dozen tables out on the carpeted floor. The bald floor-waiter smiled to her as she came in. She smiled back to him, then walked big-hippily to the counter and sat up on a stool. She ordered a Martini. The barman was a young Greek boy with white teeth and dark tight-curling hair. He liked her. She could feel it. Such a lovely boy. The Martini tasted cold and clean and took the taste of tobacco from her mouth. The only people at the tables were three men drinking together and talking loud-voiced. While talking they watched her. She crossed her long bare legs and lit a cigarette. She saw the floor-waiter over by the door watching her. One of the three men at the table lowered his voice and said something to the others. They smiled.

She studied her reflection in the glass along the back of the bar, then ordered another Martini.

'Nothing stronger?'

She turned on the stool. He was the tall one from the table. The other two watched them.

'Then what do you suggest?' she asked, smiling.

He breathed a little deeply, then returned the smile. 'Whisky?'

She smiled brightly. He ordered two large whiskies. The barman poured the drinks and pushed them across the counter. He didn't like this tall one any.

'You don't mind?' the tall one said, indicating a stool.

She shook her head slowly. He pulled up a stool and sat facing her. He was around forty and had dark oiled hair.

'To you,' he said, and they touched glasses, first fingers extended. She saw his friends grin at each other. One was bald and the other wide-faced.

'What about your friends?' she said, smiling up at him.

'Who cares? Drink up,' he said. The raw whisky

burned her throat. Then he said : 'You don't come around here often.'

'No,' she said. 'I'm only in town a few days.'

'I certainly would have remembered seeing you before. You bet.'

He liked what he saw. What he didn't actually see left little to imagine. You bet. He was looking at her smooth bare knees. She heard her heart beat.

'Another?' he said, setting his empty glass on the counter.

She glanced around the bar. 'Don't you think it's dreadfully dull here?' she said.

'Any place in particular you want to go?' Now he couldn't take his eyes off her nipples showing under the taut wool.

'Do you live here?'

'While I'm in town,' he said, wondering how it mattered.

'What about a drink in your room?' Her heart hammered.

Jesus Christ, he thought. What did she say?

She just sat there smiling and all breasts and bare legs.

Holy Jesus Christ, he thought. Is she nuts?

'Well,' she said.

'Sure. Sure, if you want to do that we'll do that,' he found himself saying.

She came down off the stool. He took her arm and they crossed the floor. The floor-waiter opened the door for them, all the while smiling to her and thinking plenty.

The room was on the top floor and furnished with two chairs, a single bed, and a dressing-table.

'Afraid it's nothing much,' he said.

She sat on the edge of the bed. He stood in the middle of the floor watching her and wondering if maybe he was going to wake and nothing there but a glass slipper. Then he suddenly came to life and got a suit-case from under the bed. The bottle was wrapped inside a shirt with the glasses. He dropped the suit-case putting it back.

She smiled to him and saw his larynx move as he swallowed. He fumbled the glasses into his hand and poured.

She sat on the bed, legs crossed, watching him, smiling.

Then thinking he better say something and seeing she wore no coat, said : 'Aren't you cold?'

'Try me,' she said, her voice low and throaty and her heart hammering now so it hurt.

What the hell, he thought. And gaping at her.

She came to her feet, the glass held high in her right hand. 'Don't you want to touch me?'

He went on gaping.

'Go on. Touch me.'

He came slowly out of his bewilderment. 'Jesus Christ,' he said.

She put her glass on the small bedside table, then took his glass and put it alongside hers. 'Well.'

He swallowed again, wiping the palms of his hands on his trousers.

'Aren't you going to undress me?'

He couldn't find his voice but reached up both hands and fumbled with the back of her dress. Then it suddenly opened and she felt the cool air on her back. He pulled the dress down off her shoulders to her waist.

'Jesus Christ,' he said, trying to wet his mouth. He stood transfixed, staring at the immense breasts straining under the sheer black nylon. Suddenly he looked at the light.

'Leave it,' she said, and her voice shaky and deep inside of her. Then she found the hooks of the brassière and slipped out of it. He breathed through his open mouth, eyes staring, unblinking. She eased the dress down off her hips and stepped out of it. He started on his tie, not taking his eyes from her. She sat slowly down on the bed and stretched out, still wearing the panties and high shoes, the great brown nipples risen up hard and round.

The bed trembled as he lay alongside of her. She felt his hands move over her and his mouth on hers and him

hairy and warm and hairy and heavy the length of her. He fumbled with the panties and they rolled and tightened as they came off her hips.

'Take them off,' he said against her ear.

'You do it. I want you to do it.'

Afterward : 'Don't hurry it so.'

'Sure. Anything, anything.'

'Hurt me.' She felt his fingers tighten, feeling them separately, nails digging sharply in her firm, smooth skin.

'That's it. Oh, darling. Tell me you love me.'

'Of course I do.'

'Tell me.'

'I love you.'

'Say, "I love you, darling Helen".'

'I love you, darling Helen.'

'Say, "Helen you're wonderful".'

'True to hell you're wonderful.'

'Tell me something.'

'What do you want me tell?'

'Tell me something. Tell me.'

'Tell me what.'

'Little girls.'

'Hell, I've never done anything with little girls.'

'Then what's the youngest you've ever done it with?'

'Sixteen, maybe. Yes, she was about sixteen.'

'How was she? Tell me. Tell me everything.'

Afterward he lay on his side facing her. She lay on her back, eyes tightly shut, the immense breasts moving with her breathing.

With his hand there, he said : 'Why did I never meet you before? I could go on someone like you.'

'Say "Helen".'

Jesus, this one's with the birds all right, he thought. Then said : 'Helen.' She turned on her side, both hands gently touching his face. 'Darling, that was wonderful. So wonderful.'

'I never was with anyone like you.'

'No?'



'Not by a long way.'

She sat up, leaning on one elbow, and said, a little throatily :

'Do you want to?'

'Jesus Christ !' he said. 'You're some girl.'

She laughed.

'What's wrong?' he asked.

'Nothing,' she told him. 'It was just the way you said it.'

He sat up and swung his legs over the edge of the bed.

'Mind if I have a drink?'

She shook her head and smiled. He found the bottle and topped both glasses up. She reached for her one and took a large gulp. The whisky hit the back of her throat and shot tears into her eyes. She lay on one elbow and watched him pour himself another big one. His hands were unsteady, and he drank it right off like the first. She smiled to herself.

'May I?' she said.

'Huh !' He had been thinking and she had woke him up in himself.

'Another drink,' she said, smiling.

'Sure you can.' He refilled her glass, then taking a deep breath, sat there watching her slowly sip the raw whisky.

Suddenly she looked up at him. 'What are you thinking about?'

'You,' he said. 'I was thinking about how beautiful you are.'

'You're awfully sweet.' She had the blue coverlet over her now and sitting up holding it to her shoulders with her left hand.

'You're the one who's sweet,' he said.

'Come and lie down. I'm lonely.'

'Mind if I put the light out?' he asked, standing up.

'But you won't see me then,' she said, smiling again.

He smiled down at her. 'I don't need to see you anymore. I know you all.'

She reached her glass out to the table and the coverlet

dropped from under her arm-pit to reveal one immense brown-nippled breast.

'I'll put the light out,' he said.

She watched him, her heart high in her tight-feeling chest, walk across the floor to the light switch by the door, naked, and his skin so very white under the light.

Suddenly it was dark, and she lay back, eyes closed, throwing the coverlet from her, the warmth of the whisky spreading slowly through her chest. The bed moved heavily, then there was a wet cold mouth on hers and her head being forced back into the pillow and all of her under a great weight.

'Oh, Helen! Helen! Where did you get those? That's some dairy, baby.'

'Wait - wait a minute. How do you like that?'

'Baby -'

She felt the bed move, and again.

'Do that again,' she said. 'Please! Again!'

'Jesus Christ.'

Now all of it was darkness and her feeling suffocated and crushed.

WHEN SHE CAME OUT to the doorway of Milner's Hotel and Bar it was around three o'clock in the morning. The long wide hill was cheerless and empty. The freezing night air caused her to shiver and raised goose-pimples over all her body. Frost sparkled on the macadam under the high arc-lights. Now the neon sign overhead remained green. Two men, heavy in their overcoats, came up the hill. The nearest smiled to her. She looked away. The one who smiled said something to the other and he laughed, then going on up the hill and looking back.

She crossed the hill, heavy and hollow and empty-

feeling. Stale whisky retched up in her throat. As she walked her heels made a sharp real sound on the white-frosted macadam. Her mouth was bruised raw and she felt ugly inside of herself. Her teeth chattered uncontrollably as she fumbled in her bag for the keys of the car. She found them and opened the door and got in, her legs heavy and hurting; all of her hurting and her sitting slumped over the wheel silently crying, her throat aching with the awful sobs.

Oh, Frankie. Frankie, I'm sorry. I'm so sorry. I won't do it again. I promise. I can't help it. Honestly, I can't. You don't understand. Nobody who's not this way understands. It's God. That's who it is. He made me this way. He made me this way and now he won't help me. You've got to help me God. You've got to. I love him. You know that. You know I love him. Help me. Help me, please. You've got to help me. He doesn't deserve me this way. But I can't help it. You know I can't help it.

She shut her eyes tightly till a myriad of lights flashed numbingly across her brain. It was quiet and cold and she shivered. The lights ceased; and with the ceasing of the lights she saw his face, clear in every detail.

I love you, Frankie. I love you. Please forgive me. I won't ever do it again. I promise. I love you. Tell me, Frankie. Please tell me you love me. Say, 'I love you, Helen.' Please. I'll say it for you. 'I love you, Helen. Sweet one. Darling one. *I love you.*' Isn't that sweet, darling? I love you too. I won't ever think about anyone but you. And, dear God: I'll pray to you every morning and before I go to sleep. I promise. Thank you for helping me. I won't ever do that again. I promise. All I want you to do is let him love me. I'll be good. I promise I'll be good. Really I will. You heard me promise.

One of the heavy all-night trunks coming up-hill dazzled her with its headlights. She sat up and started the motor, put the car around in a wide turn and drove back up the hill slowly; all the while his face before her and her smiling to him.

THE FIGHT WAS to be made in the commissioner's office at two-thirty in the afternoon of Tuesday the twenty-third.

On Sunday morning it was raining. After breakfast they all went out to the gym. It was dark outside and with the rain on the windows. Lang had gotten more drunk and more drunk till on the last week he had been pretty near drunk the whole time. He had stopped going out on the road in the mornings and Charley had paced for Frankie and Moore on the bicycle. Somehow he always made the gym sessions though, more drunk than sober, but after supper nobody saw him again till they came in off the road in the morning. He was in a pretty bad way and kept telling everybody how glad he would be when it was all over and he could go into town and have his insides seen to.

Sunday afternoon when Frankie and Moore climbed out the ring after the sparring session, Scheff and Wouk and this tall grey-haired one were waiting for them. Lang came down from the apron with Frankie's towel around his neck and carrying the headgear.

'How are you, Frankie boy? How are you?' said Scheff, faking a pass at Frankie's ribs with a left.

'Great', Frankie says. 'Great'.

'You certainly look it, boy,' Scheff said. Then to the tall grey-haired one: 'Doesn't he look great, Ben?'

The tall one smiled. He had a silver-grey moustache and dressed like he was in business. 'I don't know much about prize fighters, Nat. But I wouldn't want to trade places with Mr. Shorr,' he said.

Scheff laughed. 'Hear that, Frankie? Mr. Farrell wouldn't trade places with Shorr.' Then pausing: 'You've heard of Mr. Farrell, haven't you. Frankie? The lawyer? You ever need a lawyer you see Mr. Farrell. That right, Ben?'

'I hope it never comes to that, son,' Farrell chuckling. His voice was deep and dry-sounding.

Wouk watched it all, blank-faced.

'You know Lang, Ben,' said Scheff.

Farrell shook hands with Lang. 'Yes, I believe we've met.'

Scheff was watching Lang's face.

'You'll excuse me?' said Lang. 'I got to go into town for gauze. We're right out of gauze.'

'Let it wait,' said Scheff.

'Finished with me, Mr. Lang?' called Moore, standing apart from them.

'Sure,' said Lang. 'Tell Charley to fetch the tea.'

They watched Moore walk to the dressing-room.

'How are you finding Moore?' Scheff asked Frankie.

'Maybe I should've worked with him before. He could use a couple fights.'

'I'll see what I can do,' said Scheff. 'But yourself. Feel you can handle Shorr? There's nothing worrying you about him?'

Frankie shrugged those wide shoulders. 'I'll do my best.'

'Good. I think you can handle him. Isn't that right, Ben? Didn't I say he could handle Shorr?'

'Yes, you did. You have every confidence in Mr. Gallagher here,' Farrell said.

'What did I tell you, Frankie? You'll put Shorr away.'

Frankie looked from one to the other. 'I'll do my best.' And wondering why the hell they were going on about it.

'My money says you'll win. Isn't that so, Ben?'

'Well you talked me into putting my money down too,'

said Farrell. 'But now I see for myself whose hands it rests in, I feel greatly relieved. In fact, I'm greatly confident.' Farrell knew how to talk all right.

'What about you?' Scheff said to Lang.

'Me?' Lang coming out of it. 'Sure, I told him all along he could take Shorr.'

Wouk took it all in. Wouk was a great talker.

Charley came in from the hotel with the tea.

'Better go have your tea,' Lang said to Frankie. 'We'll swing the bag work-out today.'

'I'll see you before we go,' said Scheff.

Frankie walked back to the dressing-room leaving them talking by the ring.

When he came out the shower, Charley and Moore had gone upstairs. He was finished dressing when Scheff came in.

'We're just leaving,' he said, taking a leather cigar case from his inside coat pocket. 'I thought I'd see if everything was all right.'

'I got no complaints,' says Frankie.

Scheff got the cigar drawing. 'Just wanted to make sure. We wouldn't want anything to go wrong with the money you're carrying.'

'You think that wise?' says Frankie, watching his face. 'Shorr's no push-over.'

'You can do it,' Scheff studied the cigar. 'You know you can.'

Frankie didn't say anything.

Scheff watched the cigar smoke drift in the warm air across the rubbing-table. 'I thought I'd leave Wouk here.'

'What's he going to do?' says Frankie, puzzled.

'Well, I know how it is before an important fight. You never know who is going to try to get to who. So I think Wouk better stay around till you come into town.'

'Suit yourself.'

'Good. It's nothing on you, Frankie. You know that.'

'Sure,' says Frankie, and not knowing anything.

‘Then all the best. I won’t see you till just before the fight. Take care of yourself.’

‘Don’t worry,’ says Frankie. ‘I’ve took care of myself a long time.’

They went out to the car. Farrell was sitting in front waiting for them. Scheff got in behind the wheel. It was still raining and there was the steady sound of the rain in the trees and on the wet gravel. He stood in the doorway and watched Scheff drive the car down the long sloped driveway then wave back as he stopped before swinging on to the shore road to Kosanta. It was raining so you could not see the shore through the pine trees along the road. Everything was cold and clean and fresh-smelling in the rain.

NEXT MORNING FRANKIE and Moore were out on the driveway waiting for Charley to come around with the bicycle. The morning was fine and clear with a breeze coming off the ocean and the tops of the trees moving with it. The air was cold and crisp and with that fresh salt smell. Frankie wore the heavy police trousers gathered in at the bottom of his legs, and the crew-neck sweater with a white towel around his neck and ends tucked down the front of his sweater. Moore wore an old grey track-suit with an army combat jacket over the jumper and zipped to his neck.

‘You supposing Charley run himself down with that cycle?’ said Moore.

‘Maybe Dubuque forgot leave out the key for the shed,’ says Frankie looking at the pines along the road, black-shadowed against the sun rising fiery red far out on the ocean : ‘See that? I bet you sell plenty postcards they got

pictures on them like that. I'd have that picture on Christmas cards too. That's much better than snow every place and a light shining out a window.'

Moore nudged him.

Wouk was standing in the doorway with his overcoat over his vest and trousers and the derby jammed down over his head. He stared straight ahead like maybe Frankie and Moore weren't there at all. Then Lang came around the end of the building pushing the bicycle.

'How 'bout that?' said Moore out the side of his mouth. 'This new gentleman friend of ours gone and improved the service.'

'Let's get going,' said Lang, riding past them on the bicycle.

They started after him at an easy trot. It was a pleasant morning and they ran about three miles out. Lang didn't speak the whole way out or back, but he didn't force the pace any and he had cut the mileage down being the last day.

When they got back, Frankie showered, changed, and went down to breakfast. Lang was sitting at the table with Moore, staring out the french windows at the driveway. Moore glanced up at Frankie as he sat down. Lang went on staring out of the windows, the muscles working around his mouth. He was plenty worried about something. Dubuque came in behind Charley with the breakfast. Frankie glanced at Lang across the table. He was still staring out of the windows and having a bad time keeping his hands steady.

Nobody said anything till they were through with the stewed prunes. Then Lang said: 'You can take it easy today. A light work-out this morning and two rounds with Moore in the afternoon.' He spoke like his throat was swollen tight inside.

Frankie nodded. After the prunes Lang didn't talk any more, and after one cup of coffee went upstairs.

'I reckon our friend got Mr. Lang jumped some,' said Moore.



'See him eat?' said Charley. 'His hands flap so bad I think he going beat hisself to death with the spoon.' Frankie went on eating.

'Something's far wrong here,' said Moore. 'I get that feeling the first day. And the way he puts you through it I'm beginning to think you maybe fight two Shorrs the same time. My money says you fit enough fight forty rounds. Man-oh-man, they sure want to make certain you going win.'

Frankie shoved his chair back from the table. 'You know,' he says. 'I got an idea there more to it than that.'

'Man, maybe you're right. I never see an outfit like this before.'

'I been thinking too but I don't even see daylight,' Charley said.

'Anyhow, you can count on us,' said Moore. Then grinning broadly. 'I got paid yesterday. I don't owe them gentlemen nothing more.'

'Thanks, Gunner. You too, Charley,' says Frankie.

'That okay,' said Charley. 'Anytime.'

The sunlight came in through the long windows. It was warm sitting in the sunlight.

After breakfast Frankie went up to his room and collected the road clothes. Out in the hallway he met Wouk going into Lang's room. Wouk didn't even look his way. He went on downstairs and out the front door and around back of the hotel to the drying area. It was warm and birds singing and the day bright and new and green.

Coming in from putting out the clothes, the door to the office opened and Dubuque motioned to him quickly.

'What is it?'

Dubuque put his hand to his mouth. He was as bugged as Lang.

Frankie went inside quickly and shut the door.

'Okay. I tell you this, no trouble, please. Mr. Scheff will make plenty trouble if he finds out I tell you. Okay?' He kept tugging the ends of the fancy waistcoat he wore.

'You got my word,' says Frankie.

'Huh! What is anybody's word good for?' Dubuque rolling his eyes. He was sweating plenty too. 'You know somebody called Gessler?'

'Yeah. Go on.'

'Last night he called and ask if he can see you. I'm sorry I not able tell you before. That Wouk walk, walk, walk all night. I get scared maybe he hears me come upstairs.'

'Did Gessler say where he was?'

Dubuque hesitated, sighed, then said : 'Timlon House. It's in town.' He pushed a slip of paper across the desk with the number.

Frankie reached for the telephone. Dubuque put his hand on it, then looking up big-eyed. 'No trouble. Please.'

'Sure. Don't worry,' says Frankie.

Dubuque put both hands to his head.

A woman telephonist answered, and he asked for Gessler. Then followed a series of loud clicking sounds on the line, and suddenly : 'Gessler here.'

'This's Frankie. I just got your message.'

'Can I see you? It's important. I could say something now but I don't want you going off half-cocked.'

'I can't make it now. They got Wouk sitting on the doorstep. Maybe after supper. Supper's at eight.'

'All right. I'll park the car on the shore road. Make sure they don't miss you.'

Frankie put the telephone down, sweating as bad as Dubuque now.

'Much trouble?'

Frankie came out of it. 'No, no trouble.'

Dubuque opened the door and Frankie stepped out and Wouk was there in the hall. They looked at each other. Wouk took the cigarette out his mouth. 'What you doing?' he said.

'What's it to you?' says Frankie, and the lips moving none. Wouk looked from him to Dubuque, then went on

outside. Frankie heard Dubuque's breath come out. 'Take it easy,' he says, then went out to the gym.

WHEN THE AFTERNOON SPARRING session was through, Frankie went upstairs and lay down on the bed. He could hear Wouk outside walking on the gravel. All Wouk did was walk. Wouk was still walking outside when he went to sleep.

He woke with Lang leaning over him shaking his shoulder.

'It's time we went down to supper, Frankie.' Lang's breath was stiff with whisky. It was just getting dark outside. Wouk had stopped walking. He got off the bed and stretched in front of the window. Stars were beginning to show in the clear sky and the trees along the shore road were dark-shadowed and beginning to lose shape in the growing darkness.

'How are you?' Lang asked.

Frankie looked at him in the gloom. 'Okay. Yourself?'

'I'll be glad when it's over.' He was standing in the adjoining doorway in the light from his room, old and tired-looking. 'You don't want to oversleep, you know.'

'After supper I'll go out take a walk.'

'You can stay up late tonight. You don't have to wake early tomorrow.'

Frankie sat on the bed and put on his shoes. 'I'd rather turn in early than sleep late,' he says, with it all worked out.

'Well you do as you want,' said Lang, not wanting any argument.

Coming out the bathroom, he met Charley and Moore

going down to supper. 'I still can count on you?' he asked.

'All the way, man,' Moore said.

'Well after supper I'm going out take a walk. Say you want to go along.' Then to Charley: 'Can you watch television till it shuts down?' Charley looked thoughtful. 'Sure I could, but I never tried it before.'

'Stay up late as you can. Then go up to Gunner's room. He won't be there but you start talking like he's there. Okay?'

'Say that again,' said Charley, puzzled.

'Just get in Gunner's room and keep talking. That's all you got to do, Charley. Keep talking.'

Lang was waiting for them in the dining-room. Dubuque brought in supper; stewed liver with sprouts and spinach for Frankie and Moore, and sole for Lang and Charley.

'Say,' said Charley. 'Where the undertaker? Don't he eat?'

'He eats in his room,' said Lang.

'Why? Can't he use a knife and fork like the rest us?'

Lang picked around with his fork at the fish till the others were through eating.

'In't you hungry?' Frankie asked.

Lang shoved his plate away. 'I'm hungry all right but I can't face it.' Then patting his belly: 'Can't take much more of this.'

'Tried milk?' said Charley. 'My old man drank milk. He drank gallons of milk.'

Lang pulled a face.

'Think I'll take that walk now,' says Frankie.

'Man, maybe I'll go with you,' said Moore, getting his legs out from under the table.

'Better put on your sweater and coat,' Lang said to Frankie. He went upstairs for the crew-neck sweater and windjammer.

Moore was waiting downstairs wearing his combat jacket and a felt hat with the brim turned up all round.

They went outside together. The moon was up out over the ocean and silhouetting the pines along the shore road.

'What we do now, boy?' Moore was looking back at the hotel.

'We just walk up and down here a few times, then you go up to my room. I got to see a man.'

'How 'bout Lang? Don't he come in to see you?'

'Leave him to me,' says Frankie. They were walking down the driveway, feet crunching the loose gravel and everything bright as day in the moonlight. It was cold but pleasant, and the evening dew coming down and the grass silvered with the moonlight through the trees and the air sweet-smelling of the ocean and the trees and the damp grass.

'Ever know a man called Gessler?' says Frankie as they walked.

'Harry Gessler?' Their breath rainbowed in the moonlight. 'Was a Harry Gessler a heavyweight,' Moore going on. 'Real slugger. Big dark boy. That the man you mean?'

'Yeah. That's him.'

Moore had his hands deep in the pockets of his trousers. 'Nothing wrong with Gessler. Might been a big name but the con got him seven, eight years back.'

'Know what he does now?' They had almost reached the bottom of the driveway. Moore shrugged his shoulders. 'Don't see him much. Sort of gambler, I'd say. Used to see him regular out at Longview playing the horses.'

They turned and started back.

'Any idea who managed him, Gunner?'

'Wasn't Scheff. Scheff wasn't much in them days.'

While they were still a way down the driveway, Wouk came out to the doorway.

'That one don't take much for granted,' said Moore.

'First time I met him I hung one on him,' says Frankie. 'Only I never hanged it hard enough. Next time I don't forget.'

'Man-oh-man, this outfit sure give me the willies.' Next time they came up the driveway, Wouk was gone.

'This time, Gunner. Don't make no noise.' They went on inside.

All the lights down the end of the hallway were out and in the semi-darkness, narrow strips of light showed under both Lang's and Wouk's doors. Inside the room, Frankie motioned Moore behind the wardrobe. Then he opened the door to Lang's room and caught him shoving a bottle under the bedclothes. He was lying on the bed with the morning newspapers strewn across the top cover.

'Just looked in before I went to bed,' says Frankie like he hadn't seen any bottle. Then jabbing his thumb in direction of Wouk's room. 'Don't let any those apes bother me.'

'I'll take care of it, boy. Don't worry any.' He was staring wide-eyed, you know, like pretty well on drunk.

'See you in the morning then.'

Lang nodded, wide-eyed. 'Remember, I want you on the scales in the morning. First thing.' He talked slowly and flat-voiced.

'Sure,' says Frankie. 'See you.'

He closed the door, then spent a good minute turning the key in the lock.

Moore got into bed under the top cover wearing all his clothes and the hat still on his head. Frankie put the light out. The only thing that moved was Moore's big nigger eyes in the dark.

'All you do now is stay here till I get back,' says Frankie, keeping his voice low.

'What if somebody comes knocking?'

'Don't think 'bout it.'

'How you going to get out?'

'There's a door to the fire escape in Charley's room.'

Moore let out a long, long breath. 'Man-oh-man,' and his eyes rolling in the dark. Then he took his hat off and put it over his face when he caught the sound of Frankie locking the door on the outside.

Frankie almost reached Charley's room when Wouk's door opened and he came out into the hallway. He

flattened in the doorway of a room. Wouk came on down the hallway, then went into the bathroom at the top of the stairway. Frankie waited for the door to close, then made for Charley's room, his heart beating loud in his ears.

The door to the escape was unlocked. He went down the steel stairway carefully, feeling his way in the darkness of the shadow of the house. On the ground, he rounded the house, keeping to the grass till he reached the road. The moon had risen above the pines and everywhere it was bright as day. Where the hotel was, the road climbed slightly to it on both sides, and from the bottom of the driveway you looked down on to the sand dunes and the pale sandy shore and the ocean, black with the moonlight riding on it, and the surf, brightly white, running in on to the shore. The road shone too in the moonlight and ran in a long black curve, past the villas and houses with lighted windows and on into Kosanta. The lights of Kosanta showed very brightly on the headland and spread out up the low slope from the ocean. From the hotel, Kosanta seemed very far away in the moonlight. He started walking along the road.

GESSLER HAD THE BIG car parked in lee of a sand dune about a half mile from the hotel.

'How goes it, Frankie?' he said out the window.

'All right. Yourself?'

'Same. Climb in.'

Frankie went around the front of the motor and got in.

'Good to see you again,' said Gessler.

Frankie took the hand.

'What you want to see me 'bout?'

Gessler tipped his hat back and settled more comfortably behind the wheel.

'Listen, Frankie. To me you're a square kid. I reckon you got a right to know what goes on. And if you knew, you wouldn't be here now. Right?'

'Go ahead.' Frankie sat with his back against the door.

'Well, I was out of town a while when I read in the newspapers that Shorr is putting the title up, but it don't say against who. Going by the book, it's either Hennig or Volek. Most people say Hennig. Me too - at first. Then I read you're giving him the warm-up. That's when the red light came on. Follow?'

Frankie, listening intently, shook his head.

'All right, we'll go on. I've seen you in every fight you fought so far, and I know what you can do. I also know that Shorr's never taken a chance in his life. He's hung on to that title three years without ever meeting a real fighter. In my estimation three people could take Shorr. Hennig, Volek - or you. So why does Shorr want to meet *you* when he knows he's going get flattened?'

'How do you know I can beat Shorr?'

'Look, I've been around. I know the score. All Shorr can do now is clutch and run. Sure, he'll box good for seven or eight, then he'll grab every time you come inside. Then all you do when he spreads his arms is drop down and unload both hands to the belly. He's yours long before the tenth. Only Joe Smoke don't know that. Shorr's going in there odds-on.'

'Maybe I'm just as dumb as I look,' says Frankie, his head going around trying to follow it all.

'Okay, I'll tell you. I have it that Shorr's going to pick himself a soft spot and lay down.'

'You kidding? What good's that going to do him?'

'Plenty. Everybody but Joe Smoke knows he's going lose that title next time out. My guess is he's already sold it to Scheff. First off, he goes in the tank with you.



He'll pick up plenty on that. So will Scheff. Next thing is he meets Volek for the title.'

'What 'bout Hennig?'

'He's an also-ran. Remember, Shorr picks up plenty more on this than in a straight fight with Hennig, which he knows he'd lose anyway.'

'And what 'bout me?' says Frankie, out in the wilderness.

Gessler shrugged. 'That's up to Scheff. After you've beaten Shorr you're a big name. Next time out he'd maybe try and get you to take a dive against some bum with all Joe Smoke's money on you. Don't think this was all invented by Scheff. Even the great Joe Gans took a dive.' Gessler looking straight at him. 'You never thought about this?'

'Sure, I've been thinking. But I never think 'bout it this way.'

'I know. Don't feel bad. We're all green once,' said Gessler.

Frankie was staring out the windscreen: 'You sure 'bout this?'

'Ninety-nine per cent. Ever heard of Ruby Cohn?'

'Yeah. He's a bookmaker. I was in the Ecuador that night he burned out Scheff.'

'That wasn't Cohn. That was a kid called Bromberg paying off a debt. Only Scheff don't think. He just sends out a couple of bombers. But anyway, getting back to it, Ruby found out there was a lot of big money being unloaded on you by the wrong people. Discreet money. Then we heard that you're out here training fit enough to sink a battleship while Shorr's in town living it up. So figure it out for yourself.'

'You mean they just kidding me along out here?' It suddenly dawned on Frankie. 'I'm going in there looking to murder Shorr and he's going to fold anyway? Why don't Scheff tell me?'

Gessler shrugged again. 'Either he don't trust you yet, or maybe he thinks it's going to look better if you don't

know. Maybe he wants you on the hook. That way you don't back out from anything else. With you and Volek and the title to play with, he stands to make a fortune.'

Frankie saw it all now, all the pieces together, the big picture, clear, cold, and brutal : and him just a bum with no sense anyway.

It was quiet, and only the small ticking of the dashboard clock; and out there the moonlight riding on the dark ocean and the surf foaming brightly white on the pale sandy shore.

'What do I do now?' says Frankie, his voice flat, lips not moving.

'That's up to you. You're on your own with this one.'

Frankie thought about it. There was plenty to think about.

'What if I don't go along with it?' he finally says.

Gessler looked at him squarely : 'You'd get fished out the river.'

Frankie thought about that too.

'How much could I make on not going along?'

'There's easier ways to make money.' And Gessler thinking this boy's got balls all right.

'How much, I says?'

Gessler rubbed a hand across his mouth. 'Plenty I suppose. But you'd need help. You couldn't do a thing like that alone.'

'Know anybody?' says Frankie, feeling the knot inside of his belly get bigger.

Gessler breathed a long one. 'Maybe I could. I'd have to get Cohn in on it.'

'Well, what you think?'

'It won't be easy. I'd have to work fast. But what about you?'

'This's the end. I got something else to think 'bout. That's where the money comes in.'

Gessler sat up. 'Helen. You going take a flyer with her?'

Frankie didn't say anything.

'Well,' Gessler smiling. 'This is going to be all right. She's a nice girl. Only she'll have to know tonight. There isn't going to be much time after tonight.'

'You take me in there now?' says Frankie, with that tight feeling high in his throat. 'I want to see her myself.'

'What about back there?' Gessler was looking toward the hotel.

'Forget them. How long would it take into town?'

Gessler glanced at the clock on the dashboard : 'With a clear run we could make it by midnight.'

'Can you do it? I want to see her myself 'bout this.'

'All right. And don't worry about her. I think she'll go with you. I think she's waiting for this.' Gessler was smiling to himself.

'You seem to know her pretty well,' says Frankie, looking at him.

'Yeah. Yeah, you might say that.' And Gessler swung the big car up on to the road. He ran without lights, handling the big car easily, the illuminated needle rising steadily and the black road rushing past with the wind in the moonlight. Coming into Kosanta, he put the lights on; the little town deserted and the only light in the square in the window of the café where the taxi drivers sat out the time. Outside of town they passed under the stone-arched railway bridge, the road swinging away from the shore and leaving the lights of Kosanta behind by the ocean.

SCHEFF LEFT GEORGE to park the car and went on inside. He could hear her in there singing. She sang really beautifully in Spanish. Not only was her singing beautiful but it was how she held herself while she sang.

The maître d'hôtel opened the door as soon as he saw him come through the foyer.

'Good evening, sir.'

'How is it tonight, Ramon?' Scheff looking at his watch.

Only a few of the tables close to the floor were occupied.

'It is early yet, sir.'

Scheff watched her sing, not hearing her sing but seeing the way she held herself and how she moved to the fast Latin rhythm. She had her hair pinned high on her head and wearing a green tight-fitting gown cut so most of her breasts and legs showed.

'Ramon. When Miss Guerrera is through, tell her I want to see her.' Scheff stayed out in the foyer till she was almost through and the maître d'hôtel making his way to the dressing-room, then went upstairs.

He was standing by the bar lighting a cigar when she came in.

'Well, well,' he said, looking at her and letting the smoke drift from his mouth. 'I thought you'd deserted me?'

'You're a fine one to talk,' she said. 'I've hardly seen you lately. You always seem to be coming or going on business.'

He smiled quickly. 'Maybe you're right, Helen. I have been pretty busy lately. But that's over now. From tonight I relax.' Raising both hands, palms uppermost. Then : 'A drink for the beautiful lady?'

'Thank you,' she said.

He mixed the drinks. She took a seat on the divan, gathering the hems of the gown to her lap so her legs did not show much above the knee.

'Aren't we getting prudish?' Scheff brought the drinks.

She smiled back at him, wishing he had not come in this night, the one night before the other.

'That's it, darling. Smile for Nat.' And sitting beside her : 'Has anybody ever told you you're beautiful?'

'I believe you're drunk,' she smiled.

'That's a wonderful girl. Take an interest in Nat. Hum-m-m.' He ran his mouth along her shoulders.

She laughed lightly. 'Tell me where you've been.'

'A dinner-party. At Farrell's place.'

'Weren't there any beautiful women?'

'None so beautiful as you, darling.'

'You're drunk.'

'I'm not drunk. I'll prove it.'

'No, don't,' she said. 'I've got to go on out there again.'

He stood up, looking down at her, and her knees and those immense breasts swelling across the top of the low-cut neckline. 'Go and change. We're going out to celebrate. Come on.' He brought her to her feet.

'Don't be silly, Nate. I have to go on again.'

'To hell with them. I'll have Judy brought in.'

'You can't. It's her only night off.'

'All right. I'll announce that you're indisposed.'

She sighed. 'Then we'll have it your way. But what are we going out to celebrate?'

'Everything. We'll celebrate everything. Now go and change.'

And the night only one night away.

God, she thought. Oh God, this is all finished. It must.

When she came out from dressing, Scheff was in the foyer.

George had a taxi waiting outside. Scheff helped her in, then once sat down, told the driver: 'Reine Pedauque.'

He held her hand. His hand was soft and warm. He smelled of cologne. They sat that way, the girl holding herself stiffly erect, and him not seeming to notice it. It was a clear cold night and the buildings on the main thoroughfare lit up and neon everywhere, red, blue, orange, and the tall buildings reflecting the many coloured lights on their windows. Suddenly he said: 'I really think we ought to live together.'

She laughed to him as if it were his joke.

'No, I mean it,' he said. 'Now things will be easier

and there will be more time. I'm not bad to live with. Don't you remember?"

She wished the driver would hurry. He could have left her tonight. It was only one more night.

'I love you, Helen.' His hand was tightly on hers.

She smiled to him. 'I know you do, Nate. You're awfully sweet.'

'You don't realize how much I love you.'

'But I do. Really I do.'

'Do you love me?'

'You know I do.'

'A man forgets easily if he's not told once in a while.'

The taxi had stopped. She looked out the window and saw the glow of pink lighting overhead and the doorman coming across the pavement under the canopy.

Inside they were met by Critchell. Critchell was short and stout and spoke with a heavy accent. Scheff had taken her shortly after they met to the Reine Pedauque to impress her. He had managed that perfectly too.

'My usual table?' asked Scheff when they were through greeting each other.

'Of course,' Critchell smiled. 'I have Gina attend you personally.'

They had a drink at the bar before going to the table. Critchell presented the wine. The wine was very strong and pleasant-tasting. When the food arrived, Scheff ate seriously, firmly holding the knife and fork and intent on eating.

She let him eat, then thinking she ought to say something, said: 'You're starved. I thought you told me you went to a dinner-party?'

He looked up smiling. 'Ah, so I did. But there was too much talking. Talking and eating gives me indigestion. That's why I enjoy eating with you. You don't fuss. With us, eating is a serious and enjoyable relaxation.' He reached for the wine. 'Here, drink. This wine is good. I must remember the name. I'll have Critch get it for me if it can't be had elsewhere.' He went back to eating.

She watched him eat. He was pleasant-faced, she thought. She had never disliked him. She didn't dislike him now. Only it was Frankie. Now it was all Frankie.

'—troubling you?' she heard him say.

She smiled. 'Oh. I'm sorry.'

'What is it?'

'It was you. You've been so busy.'

He leaned across the table. 'That's finished with. Now we'll have time.' He touched her hand under the table. 'Come, drink some more wine.'

After eating, they danced, but it was too warm and the large crowd made it uncomfortable. He led her back to the table, beckoned the waiter and paid the bill.

Outside, she felt slightly giddy. The doorman waved down a taxi for them.

Seated in back, he said : 'Do I tell him The Bruckner?'

'No,' she said. 'I couldn't face the long drive home again.'

He smiled and patted her hand, then leaning forward, told the driver : 'Lonford Heights.'

She couldn't think of any way to put him off, and she sat there feeling giddy and warm and the warmth spreading through all of her.

'You're very lovely,' he told her.

She looked down at his hands on hers.

'You're beautiful. Your eyes are beautiful — so is your mouth. Let me kiss it.'

She let him kiss her. She felt terribly warm. She felt herself tremble as if she shivered from cold. But she wasn't cold, she was warm.

'I want to kiss you — all of you.'

She tried not to hear him, and tried to think of other things, think about Frankie; but she found she could not focus him in her mind so clearly any more.

He kissed her again, his hand beneath her coat. She felt a great beating inside of her and it quicken till almost painful. She reached her hand up and touched the rough-

ness of his beard and feeling the crushing of her mouth and the smell of cologne and this wonderful warmth and beating throughout her.

She did not remember the taxi stopping, nor feeling the cold night air; and only, vaguely did she remember the sound of her heels on the polished marble floor of the hall. The lift made her head whirl; and suddenly she was sitting on the long low divan under the shaded light of the tall lamp. He was standing in front of her with a glass in his hand, smiling to her. She took the glass, the cut crystal of it on fire with light. She drank a little, feeling it go down and down and all the way down.

He knelt in front of her, took the glass, then kissed her hands, first one, and then the other. She could feel the trembling return, lightly at first, then growing stronger and stronger till it was grown to a great beating inside of her. He held her hands tightly, then his grip relaxing, his arms going around her legs and his breath hotly on her knees and him kissing her knees and, suddenly the small sharp pain of his teeth through the nylon on the soft inside of her leg. She went forward, her arms around his shoulders, bringing herself to him.

'O-o-o-oh, Nate! Oh, oh, oh!'

'Helen, no. Helen.' The whisper was loud in her head so it deafened.

'Now! Hear me? Now!'

'Not here, Helen.'

'Yes. Please!'

'No. Get up. Come,' he said, kneeling. 'Get up!'

'Please! Look! Look at this! And this. See? Look! Look at me, Nate!'

'No, listen. Get up.' He pulled her to her feet.

She lay on the cold, smooth, green satin cover, not feeling it cold; and lying there, watched him undress, hanging his coat over the back of the chair and folding his trousers over the coat and putting his shoes under the chair. He did all that unhurriedly and in complete



silence. He sat on the bed to remove his shirt and underclothes. Then she watched him remove his socks; sitting on the bed naked and white and hairless, his shoulders bowed and his face strangely red and ending in an abrupt line around his neck.

THE CHANGING MOTION of the car woke him when they came into town. Gessler swung left, then left again. The streets were empty and quiet.

'See you woke up,' said Gessler. 'We're almost there.'

'What if she in't home?' Frankie was anxious.

'We can wait if you want. She probably won't be finished at the club yet, anyway.'

They could see the block of flats now, tall and white in the moonlight and the windows brightly lit where the moon did not reach. Gessler stopped the car the far side of the street.

'Want me go along with you?' said Gessler, casually.

'I think I best go this one myself too, Harry.'

'Sure. Good luck.'

He got out of the big car and crossed the street. There was nobody in the hall. He went on up the stairs. It was very warm inside the building and the lights bright to his eyes. He found the floor and went along the hallway, his feet making no sound on the carpet. Outside the door he hesitated a moment, then knocked. She was home. He knew it. He knew it the way you knock on a door and you just feel there is somebody inside. That was how he knew it, only nobody answered. He knocked again, loudly this time, listening. Then he tried the handle. The door opened. A light burned inside. He pushed the door all

the way open, smiling, expecting to see her, and finding nobody there.

'Helen,' he says, still in the doorway.

The light from the tall lamp sparkled through the shelves of coloured wine-glasses caught in the moment of melting. It was quiet, his breathing sounding so loud.

He left the door open and walked to the foot of the stairway, hesitated, then started up. The top of the stairway was dark but for a light reflecting greenly through the partly open door of the bedroom. He started to call her name and stopped, suddenly aware of voices, soft, detached, far off sounding.

'You're beautiful, beautiful.'

'Don't talk. Not yet.'

'All right, darling. But you're beautiful.'

'Don't talk. Look at me. Keep on looking at me.'

It hit the breath from him, leaving him cold and hollow. He wanted to go in but couldn't get any of him to move. All of him was cold and the sweat cold too. Then he found himself walking downstairs. Inside he felt nothing now, not even the big cold : only in his head did he feel. He came downstairs and saw the coats on the divan and the half-empty glasses on the low table; and he went on out, leaving the door, slowly along the endless hallway : all of it going around in his head and there was so much he could not see any of it clearly.

He came out on to the steps, the cold air on his face, standing there, staring into the night. Gessler put the headlights on and turned the big car around, the lights brilliant and blinding, sweeping the steps.

'What's wrong?' called Gessler leaning out the open window. 'Something wrong?'

Frankie came down the steps and got into the car, Gessler watching him.

'Let's get out of here!' says Frankie, staring blank-faced out the windscreen.

'Did you see her?' said Gessler. 'Did she say anything?'

'Come on! Let's get out of here!'

Gessler put her in gear. 'Where we going?'

'Any place! Get going!' Gessler headed the big car out toward Kosanta. After they had driven awhile, Frankie says: 'How do we fix this bastard!'

Gessler pulled the car over to the side of the road up out from the city. Up there, looking back, it was all sky and the moon and the city sprawled out below under its lights.

'What did she say, Frankie? Want to tell me?' asked Gessler, watching him.

'I'm going to fix Scheff, Harry. I'm going to fix him good.'

Gessler sat back. 'Well we're going to need Cohn. We're going to need his boys too.'

'Can you do it, Harry?' says Frankie, losing some of that bitterness now.

'Sure. But it's got to be done fast. Listen - '

THE HOTEL WAS in darkness. He kept to the grass till he reached the back of the house, then went up the way he came out. There was only one light burning in the hallway. He could see the strip of light under Lang's door. It was quiet, and he found his way along the hallway slowly, carefully keeping to the carpet. He was almost there and suddenly the door of Lang's room opened and they were staring at each other across the breadth of the hallway. Lang's face was frozen in shock. His mouth started to open and Frankie slammed bodily into him, hand over his mouth. They went into the room together

and Frankie swiftly closed the door with one hand while pinning Lang by the mouth to the wall with the other. He turned the key as they heard Wouk's door open.

'That you Lang?' said Wouk out in the hallway.

Frankie cocked his right hand back, Lang's eyes starting out of his head. Then he took his hand off his mouth. Wouk tried the handle of the door. 'You all right, Lang?'

'Yeah - yeah, I'm all right,' said Lang, trying to get his dry mouth working.

'Then what the hell you doing?'

He glanced at Frankie, then at the door.

'I, I was out at the bathroom. I tripped on the carpet coming back.'

'Well go to sleep.'

They heard him move outside, then his door close.

Frankie nodded toward the bed. Lang moved slowly across to it and sat down. He was holding on to his hands to stop them shaking.

'Okay,' says Frankie, his voice low. 'Out with it.'

Lang swallowed. 'I don't know what -'

Frankie grabbed his shirt and twisted it around so tight the buttons broke.

'All right, all right.' Lang was trying to get Frankie's hand loose. '- Scheff's going to kill me. He'll kill me.'

'If he don't - I will.' Frankie had murder in his eyes all right.

Lang stared, open-mouthed. Frankie tightened his grip on the shirt and shook him so his teeth rattled.

'Shorr's going to fold.'

'When?'

'Any time after the fourth.'

'Why didn't Scheff tell me?'

Lang was having a bad time breathing. 'He wanted you on the hook.'

'The title. What 'bout the title?'

'Volek's. Shorr sold out to Scheff.'

'And the girl?'

'Let go,' Lang pleaded.

Frankie let him go. Lang sat there holding his throat with both hands.

'What 'bout the girl?'

'She's Scheff's.' Lang didn't look at him. 'Been Scheff's girl a long time.' Then looking up at him. 'I never said anything. You know that. I got nothing to do with this either. All I had to do was take you out here and make it so you thought it was real. I didn't want to. It was Scheff made me do it. I told him not to. I told him you could make the championship anyway. I told him. I told him, Frankie.'

Frankie just stood there listening to it all.

Lang got a pint bottle from under the pillow and took a big one.

Then Frankie says : 'This how it was with Hackmer?'

'The first time.' Lang was sitting there with the bottle, old and tired and broken inside. 'Jack was a good boy. We never did anything like that before.'

'Why didn't you pull out after?'

'He had me hooked. Don't let him get you hooked, boy. Hear me?' He came slowly to his feet, looking Frankie in the face. 'I didn't sell you. I didn't sell you, Frankie. You're the best I ever had.'

'Take it easy.'

Lang sat down. 'He'll kill me. He's going to kill me.' He didn't shake any more.

'Nobody'll kill you, old man. Take it easy.'

Lang closed his eyes and lay back on the bed. Frankie put the light out, then slowly, quietly unlocked the door. He put his head out and listened. Wouk was snoring.

Moore was sitting up in bed when he went in, big nigger eyes rolling in the dark.

'Man,' he whispered. 'I was beginning to think you'd gone for all time.'

'You better go easy on the way back,' says Frankie. 'Wouk's liable to leap out on you.'

Moore's eyes rose ceiling-ward.

'You best get going before it's daylight.'

Moore got up and went creeping out into the hallway. Frankie waited by the door but no sound came back. Then he undressed and got into bed. Everything was quiet and there was only the sound of the ocean on the shore in the moonlight. The moon was across the sky now, beyond the lights of Kōsanta.

HE WOKE WITH CHARLEY shaking his shoulder.

'Hey! Wake up! Wake up! Lang's gone!'

Frankie looked at him. 'Gone? What you mean, gone?' he says, not even knowing where he was.

'Gone! He's nowhere around. Wouk's been out on the road - everything!'

Frankie swung his legs out of bed. It was a nice day outside. The sun came in through the window.

'When did he go?' says Frankie, finally.

'Was Wouk missed him. Everybody slept late. About eight o'clock he came charging in asking if I see Lang. I say "no", and he charged right out again.'

He tried to think where Lang might have gone. Probably he would head for town. Wouk would have called Scheff. They would be watching the roads. Lang wouldn't go looking for Scheff. If he had been going to say anything he would have told Wouk. Thinking about it, Lang wouldn't walk openly into town. Maybe he wouldn't even go there.

He put on his shoes and the bathrobe and went downstairs with Charley to the gym. In the dressing-room he undressed and stepped on the scales, naked, watching Charley slide the weights on the bars.

'One-fifty-nine and a half,' said Charley. 'Just what we wanted.'

Frankie dressed and they went upstairs.

'What 'bout Lang?' said Charley when they were back in the room.

'Nothing we can do. He'll probably keep out the way.'

'Anything happen last night?'

'Plenty. I'll tell you and 'Gunner what you do later. What time are we going into town?'

'Wouk's driving us in 'bout mid-day. There's a hired car coming out from Kosanta.'

'Well I'm going back to bed now. Call me eleven o'clock.'

'You want the orange juice now?'

'Bring it when you come back.'

When Charley was gone he got back into bed. He lay there hearing the birds singing outside in the sunlight and the ocean sounding loud and near. The sunlight came in brightly through the window.

It seemed he was hardly asleep when Charley was back.

'How do you feel, Frankie?' he asked, handing him the glass with orange juice.

Frankie sat with his legs over the edge of the bed and drank the juice slowly and didn't say anything.

He was sitting like that on the bed when Wouk came in. 'You know Lang's gone?'

'Charley told me early on,' says Frankie not looking at him.

'Know where he's going?' Wouk had a way of talking out the side of his mouth.

'How do I know?'

'You were pretty thick with him.'

'Looked in all your pockets?'

'If you wasn't fighting tonight I'd break your neck, bright boy.'

'You couldn't break wind.' Frankie was sitting there on the bed looking up at him. That was Frankie all right.

Wouk took a long breath, a longer look, the muscles the side of his jaw quivering, then turned and went out.

'Now there goes a nice fellow,' said Charley.

Frankie came off the bed and looked out the window. The sun was high above the pines now, big and golden, and the sky almost summer blue.

'Be all right coming out here in the summer,' says Frankie.

'Cost plenty,' said Charley, pulling a face. 'I found last year's card in the room - whe-e-eh!'

Frankie put on the bathrobe, then went out and took a shower. He wanted a shave, but left it. That was one of Madden's ideas. That was all he had of the old man's now; the idea of not shaving a couple of days before a fight. He stopped drying himself and thought about Madden. There was too much to think about, so he put all the thoughts out of his mind and went back to drying himself.

When he came into the room, Charley had most of his things packed.

'Where you put the ring clothes?'

'I put them in the other bag when you was sleeping. It's in the car.'

Frankie took a look out the window. The car was parked close to the front door. It was one of those big black old-fashioned saloons.

'It looks like a hearse,' grinned Charley, then stopped. 'I'm sorry, Frankie.'

Frankie looked at him. 'So it looks like a hearse? So what?'

'I'm sorry.'

'Forget it.' He started dressing. Charley had everything laid out on the bed. He sat down and pulled on the slim-fitting grey flannel trousers, then the white sweat shirt.

Charley watched him. 'You know, for a main-bout fighter you got some wardrobe.'

Frankie stood up and put on the old windjammer. 'Maybe after this one I'll buy a suit.'

'That'll be something,' said Charley, grinning and blinking and tugging his neck out of his shirt.



'How we fixed?' Frankie looked around the room.

'That's everything, champ.'

Frankie carried the bag downstairs and put it along with the other one in the boot of the old high-bodied La Salle.

'Hey!' Frankie called to Charley standing in the doorway. 'What 'bout Gunner?'

Charley looked thoughtful. 'How you like that? I forgot 'bout him. He's still in bed.'

Frankie shut the boot of the car, then with his hands in his pockets, started down the long driveway, his feet crunching the loose gravel.

Everything was bright and warm and a fresh cool breeze from the ocean. He stopped at the bottom of the driveway and looked back at the house. In the sunlight it was solid and grey and real. The sunlight reflected brightly from the windows and the green of the grass very green. The pines moved gently overhead in the breeze and old needles spiralled down brown and sun-dried. He crossed the black oiled macadam and walked through the high brown sea grass, feeling the grass brush his legs, to the shore. The dry sand was pale yellow and he could feel it in his shoes, working through his socks and between his toes. So close to the ocean the breeze was cold and sharp-smelling of salt and drying seaweed left as the tide went out. Walking where the water had been the sand was firm and small, sandy bubbles appeared as he walked. He walked a little way along the shore, then turned and came back. It was pleasant walking on the firm sand and feeling the breeze from the ocean so cleanly about you.

He stopped among the wind-rippled sand-dunes and looked back at the ocean, the breeze blowing a light sea shoreward and the ocean blue and deep-looking and far out meeting the sky and it too clean and nothing in it but the sun. Out there, was nothing but the ocean and the sky and nothing. On the shore, the ocean broke and foamed white and brilliant on the sand with the sound

of a million sea-shells. He turned again and started back, feeling the sun hot on him and the sand in his shoes and between his toes.

They were waiting out front by the car as he came up the driveway.

'Where you been?' said Charley. 'We been looking for you.'

'I took a walk. Always wanted see what was out there.'

Wouk came out carrying Lan's suit-case and bag, put them in the boot, then got in behind the wheel. Dubuque and his wife came out to the doorway.

'All the best be with you,' said Dubuque. His wife stood by his side, big built, her head shining golden in the sunlight.

'Thanks,' says Frankie. 'Maybe we'll be out see you again. Thanks for everything. You got a nice place here.'

Wouk had the motor running.

Charley and Moore called their thanks, then they all got in the back of the car. Wouk looked straight ahead. As the car went down the driveway, Dubuque stood on the steps watching them go and his wife by his side smiling.

THEY CAME ON to the by-pass outside town about one-thirty. Frankie had slept most of the way. He sat up and looked out the window. Wouk had down the green sun-visor and they were speeding fast along the dual-carriage-way. As they drove further into town they passed on the left a large sign with a long arrow, and underneath: CITY CENTRE AHEAD. A little way further on,

Wouk slowed the car, turned left and headed it up-hill on the wide tree-lined roadway.

'Hey,' says Frankie. 'Where you going?'

'The Bruckner.'

'I think we was going straight to the weigh-in.'

Wouk grinned into the rear-view mirror. 'So you can think too, bright boy?' Frankie held the look, then sat back between Charley and Moore. Moore winked to him. Charley sat staring into the back of Wouk's head.

When they stopped outside the Bruckner, the green and gold uniformed doorman met them.

'What do we do with the bags?' Moore asked Wouk. 'Maybe somebody walk off with them.'

'Not outside this place they don't.' Wouk was looking at him oddly.

They all went upstairs. Scheff was waiting for them.

'Good to see you, boys. And you, Frankie.' Slapping him on the shoulder. 'You look terrific. How do you feel?'

'Fine,' Frankie says. 'Okay.'

Then Scheff to the others: 'Go right in, boys. Help yourself to a drink. Wouk! If there's anything the boys want and it isn't there, call Mike. I want to talk with Frankie a moment.' Then when they had gone into the lounge: 'I heard from Wouk this morning about Lang. I'm sorry about that. He's done the same thing a couple of times since Hackmer double-crossed him. You know how it is. The tension builds up till he can't take it. The game is better clear of the Hackmers when they pull things like that.'

'Yeah,' says Frankie. 'That just the way it goes.' And thinking so this is how it is when you get sold down the river.

'Sure it is. We know that. But I was wondering if maybe it had upset you?'

'No. It's okay with me. I feel fine. I reckon I can take this Shorr all right.'

'That's it, Frankie.' Scheff slapped him on the shoulder again. 'That's how to talk. Now come on inside.'

In the lounge, Wouk was sitting on one of the chrome-legged stools at the bar, and Charley and Moore sitting on the divan taking the whole place in.

Scheff poured himself a drink. 'Anything for you, Frankie?'

'Nothing now. I got to wait for the weigh-in.'

'What did you weigh this morning?'

'One-fifty-nine and a half,' says Frankie.

'That's good. You can eat right after you come back from the commissioner's office. I thought it would be better if you stayed here till you went down tonight.' Scheff was watching him.

'Sure,' says Frankie. 'That's okay with us.'

Scheff smiled. 'There was one other thing. I thought I'd arrange for Pete Nieder in your corner tonight.'

Frankie hadn't thought about that one.

'No. I think I best stay along with Gunner and Charley. Better without somebody I never worked with.'

'Sure?'

'Yeah. I feel best that way. Gunner knows all the angles.'

'Well, it's up to you, Frankie. If you don't want him then you don't want him.'

Frankie looked at the clock over the bar.

'I think we best get down there.'

'Wouk will take you down. I'd come down too but I've got to see Farrell.'

Charley and Moore went across and put their glasses on the counter.

'Man,' said Moore looking at the lithograph of The Nonpareil, 'Old Dempsey himself. He hold that title seven years before Fitzsimmons took it.'

'Where you get that?' says Frankie.

'I read out a book. I read 'bout all the old ones, Johnson, Berg, Petrolle, Ross, Tunney - ' Moore said, proudly.

'All right, all right,' said Wouk. 'Let's get down there.'

Scheff saw them to the door, and they all went downstairs and out to the car.

SHORR WAS ALREADY in the commissioner's office when they arrived. Three other men were sitting alongside him on the bench in front of the desk. Sitting on the bench behind them were four newspapermen and a couple of photographers. They all looked up as Frankie came in with Charley and Moore. Right then, the door the far side of the big room opened and the doctor came out. He saw Frankie and his face brightened.

'Hello there,' he said. 'Nice to see you again.'

'How are you, Mr. Williams?' says Frankie.

Shorr got up and came over to them. 'You're looking well, kid,' he said.

'You don't look so bad yourself, kid,' says Frankie. Jesus Christ, some Frankie all right.

Shorr looked at him out the tops of his eyes.

And Doctor Williams said : 'Well, who's first?'

'I'll take it, Doc,' said Shorr.

The tall one wearing the spectacles followed him in to the surgery. The other two sat where they were. One was short and bald, and the other young-looking under his grey hair and wearing a closely trimmed moustache. The tall one gone in with Shorr was his manager, Jacob Krawiec.

Frankie joined Charley and Moore on the same bench as the newspapermen. After they had all sat down, one of the newspapermen got up and went across and spoke to the commissioner and his two deputies at the desk. Frankie recognized the newspaperman as Koenig.

The commissioner looked over at Frankie. 'Where's Lang?'

'Sick,' says Frankie. 'Now it's Brunek and Moore in the corner tonight.'

The commissioner went back to talking with Koenig. They were smiling about something.

The door of the surgery opened and Shorr and Krawiec came out. Shorr was putting his coat on.

'Gallagher,' said Williams, and Frankie got up and went inside.

He was inside about eight minutes, then came out followed by Williams.

'You can weigh-in now,' said Williams to the commissioner.

One of the deputies indicated the nearest of two doors behind the desk. Charley and Moore were waiting for him inside. The only furniture in the room was two wooden chairs and a cloth-covered table. Charley handed him the new black trunks with the white waistband and stripes when he was undressed. He put them on, and Moore slipped the old faded bathrobe over his shoulders. Then one of the deputies knocked on the door and called : 'You boys ready?'

Frankie followed Charley and Moore out, walking barefoot and holding the front of the bathrobe from inside with his left hand. Shorr hadn't come out. They had the scales set in front of the desk. Then the other door opened and Shorr came out wearing a bright red satin bathrobe over his shoulders and BILLY SHORR in big white letters across the back.

The commissioner nodded, and Charley slipped the bathrobe off Frankie as he stepped on the scales. Frankie looked down on top of the commissioner's bald head as he slid the weights along the bars.

'One-fifty-nine and three-quarters,' said the commissioner, his breath smelling of cigar smoke. 'Frankie Gallagher, one-fifty-nine and three-quarters.' Frankie stepped down, and Charley slipped the bathrobe over his shoulders.

Shorr was watching the commissioner slide the weights.

He was darker-skinned than Frankie and wider at the waist. He carried a lot of scar tissue around his nose and mouth and his eyes were set deep under the high-sloping forehead. His black hair was cut short and carefully oiled down.

'One-fifty-eight and one-quarter,' said the commissioner. 'Billy Shorr, one-fifty-eight and one-quarter.'

Shorr stepped down.

'Can we have a picture now?' one of the photographers asked.

Krawiec looked at Shorr. Shorr nodded. 'All right', said Krawiec, flat-voiced.

'With the robes off?'

Frankie and Shorr came out of their bathrobes. One of the photographers posed them together, then stepped back by the other, both of them looking through the sights. The flash-bulbs went off with Frankie and Shorr shaking hands in front of the scales and with the commissioner looking over their shoulders. After the pictures they went in to dress.

When Frankie came out with Charley and Moore, Koenig and another newspaperman were talking with Shorr and Krawiec. The commissioner called both fighters to the desk and gave them the usual about how it was to be a good clean fight. The gloves were on the desk, and after shaking hands with them both, the commissioner handed them the gloves. Charley pulled them on for Frankie and watched him work his hands in them. Frankie nodded. One of the deputies took them off and marked them on the inside with a ball-point.

'See you tonight, kid,' Frankie says to Shorr.

Shorr turned around, and they all watched Frankie go out with Charley and Moore, Frankie carrying his own bag and walking that curious way of his, heels on the ground, sort of flat-footed, head a little to the right and his chin down.

They all walked down the glass-partitioned hallway, feet sounding loud on the cement floor, to the lift. As

they turned the corner the end of the hallway, Gessler stepped in behind them. Charley brought the lift down from the fifth floor. When it stopped, they all got in. Gessler pressed the button, looking from Charley to Moore.

'All right, Harry. They're with it,' Frankie says.

They were going down.

'Everything's set,' Gessler was talking fast. 'It's all yours. But watch out for a disqualification if he thinks something's gone wrong. Don't worry about outside the ring.'

The lift stopped, and the doors opened. The light showed they were on the first floor. Gessler got out.

'He'll get the message once he's in the ring,' he said, and stepped away from the doors.

Charley pressed the button. The doors closed and they started down, all three looking at each other but nobody saying anything. Outside, Wouk was sitting in the car.

NUMBER SEVEN WAS the same as always, the green steel lockers, the bench along one wall, the walls powder blue and the two lights sunk flush in the ceiling.

Frankie lay on the towel-covered rubbing-table in middle of the red tile floor, eyes closed, breathing rhythmically; lying on the towel-covered table under the old faded bathrobe, another towel covering his eyes from the light; and hearing nothing, his throat tight and a feeling of lightness spread out under his ribs.

He tried not to think about anything and only succeeded in thinking about everything but never the whole of any one part of it. That way was worse than thinking about



any one part of it. One part of it you could think clear, but all of it together you never got beyond a certain point, and always when you reached that point you went back to something else that would not get any further than before.

He clenched his bandaged hands under the bathrobe, then with only his nose and mouth showing, said : 'What round they in now?'

'Must be around the fifth,' said Charley, and Frankie hearing his words muffled by the towel.

Then he heard the door open and Moore say something into the passage. He didn't hear anybody reply but Moore came back and said : 'It's the fourth. They just started the fourth.'

'This waiting got me too,' said Charley, leaning over the table.

'Yeah,' says Frankie. 'Wish to hell we got started. I feel I been laying here hours.'

'Take it easy, man,' said Moore. 'You can count on us all the way. I told you I already been paid.' Then Moore chuckling.

Then lying there, he heard Charley and Moore talk some more but not hearing what they said. It was warm on the table under the towel and bathrobe and somehow you had a far away and disassociated feeling with your head under a towel. Then he thought about Kosanta and the ocean on the shore under the blue sky.

He was thinking about the ocean and seeing and hearing it truly, when Scheff came in.

'How's my boy?' he heard him say through the sound of the ocean. He reached up under the bathrobe and moved the towel from his eyes. Scheff was looking down at him, smiling. 'Ready to go, heh? You'll show him, boy.' Then winking : 'We'll see you right after it's over. That so, Ben?'

Frankie moved his head and saw Farrell.

'Reward where reward's due,' said Farrell.

'I've already laid on a party at the Ecuador,' said Scheff.

'Well, good luck, Frankie. Give it all you've got.'

'You count on me,' says Frankie, looking at them from under the towel. He watched them go out, both wearing evening-suits, and all right in themselves. He put his head back, and Charley put the towel over his eyes and smoothed the bathrobe over him. He heard Charley say something but his eyes were closed and he was trying to get back to the ocean and not wanting to get up and go out.

The door opened. 'Last round of the semi!' called the guard, his voice loud even under the towel. 'Main event next!'

This is it, thought Frankie. This is it. I wish the hell it wasn't and I wasn't here but it is.

He sat up and swung his legs off the table and went into the toilet next the shower. When he came out he took off the black and white trunks and put the cup on, then the trunks again. He was moving around loosening up when the young-looking one with the grey hair came in from Shorr's room. Moore went out into the passage. Frankie sat up on the table, and Charley pulled the gloves over his hands, first the left, then the right. Shorr's man didn't say a word the whole time, and after the lacing, went back out. Moore came in grinning. 'All clear,' he said. 'No horseshoes.'

The door opened again. 'Main event now!'

Moore put the towelling hood over Frankie's head, and Charley took the green and white silk bathrobe off the wall-hook.

'We'll take the old one,' says Frankie.

Charley looked at him. 'You always wear this one.'

'Tonight we'll take the old one.'

Charley gathered the old bathrobe off the table and helped him into it, then tying it around the front.

'We got everything?' says Frankie.

'Everything,' said Charley. Moore nodded. They wore the white coats now. The guard stood in the open doorway. Charley and Moore followed Frankie out.

All the house lights were on and the sea of faces turning toward them as they came down the aisle. The crowd gave him a big hand. When they made it to the ring the noise eased a little but still remained loud, rolling around under the high-roofed hall. Frankie went through the ropes and into the corner, the other two in there with him, Moore smiling and his face shining under the lights. Charley had the jar with the mouthpiece in one hand and fussing around in front of Frankie, blinking rapidly now and his mouth moving like maybe talking to himself.

The noise of the crowd increased again as Shorr came out. Somewhere around the ringside somebody swung a wooden rattle. They watched Shorr duck into the ring while Krawiec held the ropes apart. A lot of shouting and whistling was going on. Shorr stood in the corner with his back to the ring, the lights highlighting the folds of the red satin bathrobe. Then the announcer and the referee climbed in the ring, the referee short and slim and all in white except for the black bow tie. The announcer held his hands up for silence, and as the noise started to ease, began announcing.

Moore nudged Frankie's elbow. Frankie looked into his face, then followed his eyes. Gessler was down in the front row close to the corner. He moved his head once. Frankie scuffed his shoes in the resin, turning as he heard his name announced and walking out a couple of paces, then turning and coming back. When the announcer finished, the referee called them to the middle of the ring. Shorr came out looking at the canvas, his face not showing anything and his black oiled hair shiny under the lights.

'Now you've heard it all before,' said the referee, a hand on each fighter's shoulder, 'so I won't go into it again. All I want is a good clean fight, no low punches, no rabbit-punching and no kidney-punching. Good luck to both of you.'

Frankie and Shorr shook hands and turned and walked

back to their corners. Charley helped him out of the bathrobe. He leaned on the ropes, flexing his knees, then turned, scuffing his shoes in the resin. Everywhere lights were fading and only the ring-lights bright and white now.

The bell rang and Frankie met Shorr out in middle of the ring, Shorr on his toes, head-feinting, gloves high, weaving. Shorr opened first, jabbing the left twice in Frankie's face. Frankie took the left, chin on his chest, carrying his hands low. Shorr backed up, sticking the left out, straight and high. Frankie went in underneath, taking the right on his shoulder and letting go his own left to the head and hooking on it with the right. It shook Shorr as it landed and he spread his arms and grabbed. Frankie wrestled him onto the ropes, and holding with the left, caught him a couple of good rights to the head before the referee shoved him off, warning him for wrestling and holding. Frankie stepped right back, spreading his arms imitating Shorr grabbing. The crowd was roaring already. The referee waved it on.

Shorr waited for him as he came in, then the straight left, and backing up, and another left and Frankie with his hands low, taking them; then Shorr crossed the right fast on another left and Frankie took both on the head and close in hooked with both hands low to the belly. Shorr grabbed to tie him up and Frankie bulldozed him around fast and butted and threw the right hand as Shorr let go to keep his balance. The roaring of the crowd was so loud it deafened. Shorr had his left glove clamped to his forehead and blood streaming off his chin onto the canvas. Frankie hit him another two shots to the body that jerked his arms down across his middle; and suddenly he was on one knee looking hurt and bewildered. The bell rang with him that way on one knee.

Frankie sat down and Charley hooked the mouthpiece out. He was talking fast but the roaring of the crowd drowned it. Frankie looked up at him. Charley wiped his

face and put his mouth to his ear : 'Christssake, what you doing?'

Frankie was watching Shorr's corner. Shorr was slumped back on the stool and Krawiec himself leaning in through the ropes working on the cut with the adrenalin swab. The short, bald one at the weigh-in was shouting fast into Shorr's face. Then the young-looking one with grey hair climbed on the apron and shouted something to Krawiec. Krawiec turned, looking down at the ringside, then gave the swabs to the bald one and climbed down.

Frankie stood up to get a better look and saw Krawiec involved in some sort of argument with somebody below the apron. Shorr sat up and turned around and Krawiec said something up to him and the bald one, and they were both talking down through the ropes. They were still at it when the bell rang.

Frankie was across the ring before Shorr was on his feet. He went straight in, throwing with both hands, head down, chin on his chest. All Shorr could do was keep moving, covering, not even able to shoot out the left hand. The roaring of the crowd drowned everything. It was all Frankie, and him throwing them so Shorr collected a lot of it on his arms and shoulders. Frankie switched the left to the head and hammered his right in Shorr's throat. Shorr hung on, his head on Frankie's shoulder, choking breath down.

'Go down and you don't never get up!' yelled Frankie, then throwing Shorr off onto the ropes and clubbing him with the right. That started the blood again. Shorr rolled off the ropes, the blood streaming down his face and looking to his corner. Krawiec was shouting in under the bottom rope and urging him on with both hands. Frankie moved in again and unloaded both hands to the belly. Shorr had lost all idea. Now everybody knew more about this than he did. Frankie hit him a couple more to the head, then rocked him with a solid right under the heart. It dropped him side-

ways onto his face. Krawiec was screaming in at him to get up. He came up slowly onto his hands and knees. It was all blood now. The referee had reached the count of 'seven' when the bell rang. All the hall was on its feet. Krawiec and the bald one were helping Shorr back to his corner. The referee had Doctor Williams climb in the ring to have a look at the gash over Shorr's eye.

Frankie sat down on the stool and Charley hooked the mouthpiece out. Moore held the bottle while he rinsed out his mouth, then tipped the bucket. Charley wiped off his face, neck, and shoulders.

'You going a bit far!' Charley was yelling. 'That last one might've dropped him for good.'

Frankie nodded. He was thinking again now. He could take Shorr any time. Shorr was nothing. He was thinking plenty clear now. He saw it all. This one, he thought. This one.

In the other corner they were busy on Shorr. The bald one was trying hard to stop the blood. Williams was watching it carefully. There was plenty blood all right. All the while the bald one worked on Shorr, Krawiec was out on the apron scanning the crowd. The young-looking one wasn't anywhere around. As the bell rang, Krawiec shouted something to Shorr, and he nodded and moved out slowly. Now they were playing for time.

All right, Frankie thought. This is it. This time.

He got up and walked right the way across the ring to Shorr, wide-open, hands low down. That way Shorr would have to come in. He jabbed the left in Frankie's face and backed up. Frankie took another two in the face, then jolted Shorr's head back with a long looping left-hand. Now only the bald one looked in from Shorr's corner. Frankie stepped it up, crowding, swinging, then a couple of wild rights that brought loud 'Oh's' from the crowd. Shorr kept backing up but having to cross the right to help keep him off. Still the bald one was by himself. Frankie crowded some more, then set himself, fired the left, and missed, then followed with the right,

looping it around the head. He was cold. Shorr had to hit him. He uppercutted and hooked with the steam left out and Frankie shook himself, buckled at the knees, dropped his hands and waited; eyes closed, waiting waiting and suddenly the right-hand on his head. He went with it and hit the canvas on his back, arms and legs in the air. He lay there limp, listening to it and it so very slowly – five – six – seven – , at eight he rolled onto his belly and pulled himself up onto his hands and knees. He was up on one knee when the referee grabbed Shorr's arm in the air. Shorr was gaping down at him, all mouthpiece and eyes. It was all over. He let Charley and Moore lift him to his feet and walk him back to the corner.

The referee went across, and with Frankie sitting on the stool, looked into his face : 'You all right?' Then to Charley : 'Is he all right?'

'Yeah. He's all right. Let's get him back the dressing-room.'

'He had him cold too.'

'Man, he was over-anxious. That what he was,' said Moore, and lifted the bathrobe over Frankie's head.

The crowd was still noisy and a lot of pushing and shoving going on. He kept his head down under the bathrobe and suddenly he felt somebody grab his arm, then Gessler shouting : "Just keep walking! We're doing okay! Cohn's boys are keeping them busy."

It seemed a long long way through the crowd to the passage back to the dressing-rooms; and then they were through and Frankie lifted his head and saw Moore and Gessler with him. Gessler took a pen-knife from his pocket and cut the gloves off as they walked fast down the passage. Then somebody was running behind them and they turned and saw Charley. They all went right on down the passage and outside. The big car was waiting opposite the door with the motor running.

Gessler jerked the rear door open and shoved Moore and Charley inside.

'Frankie! Frankie!'

He turned and saw her run into the glow of the light over the doorway.

Gessler was climbing inside now.

'Frankie!' She grabbed at the bathrobe still over his shoulders. He shoved her from him. 'Go on! Beat it!' he says.

He turned toward the car. She got a hold of the bathrobe.

'Take me with you, Frankie! Please!'

'Come on!' somebody shouted from the car.

'Please!' she said.

He tore her hands free and went into the car, falling as the car took off and going down on the clothes and bags strewn on the floor. Somebody pulled him onto the seat and immediately they were all thrown as the car took a corner, tyres screaming, then straightened out.

'Man-oh-man,' Moore said, then laughing aloud. 'This is the craziest night I ever had. Oh, man!'

The big car had hit up speed, then slowing and swinging hard right, and suddenly speed was right down and they turned onto the main thoroughfare. They were coming to the wide traffic island, the high steel girders of the bridge outlined in the glow of light beyond.

'Pull over here, Solly,' said Gessler.

The driver pulled the big car into the kerb and stopped. Gessler switched on the roof-light. The driver was turned around in his seat, one hand shielding his eyes from the light. He was young, pale-faced, and very dark. He hadn't spoken the whole way.

Moore and Charley were getting out.

'Listen, you know what to do?' said Gessler. 'Start walking back and if Scheff isn't at St. Joe's, call the club and tell whoever answers that a couple of boys you never seen before gunned you into a car along with Frankie. Tell them they dumped you here. Tell them the car headed back up-town. Okay?'

Moore was rolling those big nigger eyes and laughing.



'I know,' said Charley. 'Watch out, Frankie.'

'Sure,' says Frankie.

Gessler slammed the door shut and put the light out.

They crossed the bridge and went on down the hill. About a half mile down the hill, Solly pulled the car over to the kerb and stopped. Across the street was The Kosher Restaurant with its bright lit windows and people eating at the tables behind the nylon curtains. Two doors further down was Milner's Hotel and Bar with the neon sign changing from green to red, then back.

'Okay, Harry?' asked the boy.

'Fine. You did a good job, Solly. I don't think anybody's going to bother you.' Gessler opened the off-side door and got out the same time as the boy.

Frankie saw them talking outside, then laughing like they made a joke. Gessler got in behind the wheel and drove away as the boy went into the restaurant.

'How you feel, Frankie?' Gessler asked, once they were in the traffic.

'Past all feeling,' says Frankie groping on the floor.

'You'll be all right after a good night.' Then : 'Don't mind your clothes. We're going down to see a friend of mine who has a hotel. It's down on the front. We can stay there a couple of days till we see how it goes.'

Frankie sat back and started taking the bandages off his hands.

'I never counted on Helen being there,' said Gessler.

'Don't talk to me 'bout her,' Frankie says.

Gessler watched the road ahead and didn't say anything. They were way down the bottom of the hill now.

SCHEFF CAME DOWN the passage followed by Wouk and Kline. The guard was outside Shorr's dressing-room. Shorr hadn't come in yet. Scheff opened the door of number seven.

'Where's Gallagher?' he said to the guard.

'They went right on out,' said the guard, pointing down the passage.

All three of them broke into a run.

The girl was out in the roadway and the big car pulling away and the girl crying. Scheff swung her around and hit her full across the mouth, then holding onto the front of her coat, back-handed her head from side to side, shouting : 'Wouk ! Wouk ! Get the car !'

Blood ran down her face from her nose and mouth. He flung her against one of the cars parked by the door and held her head back against the roof with his forearm across her throat.

Kline was out in the roadway.

'Don't stand there !' Scheff yelled. 'Get the others and bring them to the club ! Get going !' Then to the girl, quietly and through his teeth : 'So it was you ? You had it all figured. I should have known you'd pull something.'

Wouk stood on the brakes and brought the car to a halt opposite them. Scheff opened the door with his free hand and threw her inside.

'Never mind going after them ! Go straight to the club !' he shouted to Wouk and slammed the door.

Wouk put the car about.

Scheff dragged her off the floor and sat her up in the corner of the seat.

'Who told you about all this?' he shouted.

She stared back at him blankly.

'Come on! Who told you?'

She moved her head slowly. 'I don't know what you mean.' Her voice was barely audible.

'You know all right!' He hit her across the mouth. Her head slammed back. She cried aloud.

'Come on!' he said.

'I don't know. I don't know anything. I just came out and they were getting in a car.'

'Who was with them?'

'I don't know. I don't know anything.' She was talking through blood now.

'Hey!' called Wouk as they passed under an arc-light. 'You can't take her in the club like that.'

Scheff looked out the windscreen over Wouk's shoulder.

'Turn off at the lights.'

It was one of those quiet tree-lined streets with private houses set back in their gardens.

'This'll do,' said Scheff.

Wouk pulled the car over and stopped with the motor running.

The girl sat in the corner with her eyes tightly shut, breathing through blood. Scheff held her by the front of the coat and shook her. 'Who was with him? Who got in the car along with Gallagher? Was it Cohn? I know Cohn's in this. Who was it? All right.' He hit her again, then wiped the blood down her coat. She took it all, then buried her face in her hands, her whole body shaking now with the sobbing caught in her throat.

He shook her again. 'Who was with Gallagher? Tell me!'

'She's not going to say anything,' said Wouk without turning around. 'Maybe she don't know, anyway.'

'She knows all right,' said Scheff turning the handle

of the door and letting it swing open with its own weight. Then he got out and dragged her after him.

'Don't ever let me see you again. Hear me?' he said into her face and holding her up by the front of her coat. 'If I see you again I'll have you cut so bad you won't know yourself.'

He let go of her and she turned slowly and toppled on her face.

'Jesus Christ,' said Wouk. 'Go easy.'

Scheff put his foot under her and she flopped over on her back. She didn't make any sound.

'Let's get out of here,' said Wouk. 'Come on, Nat.'

Scheff looked both ways along the street, then turned quickly and got back in the car. Wouk had her in top gear before he had the door shut.

THE ROOM WAS OVER the bar of the hotel. Frankie and Gessler sat at the green baize-covered table under the shaded light playing cribbage. Frankie was one hundred and three games down. The thin curtains were open and outside, the sky was beginning to lighten a little in the east. The sky was rain-heavy and low across the river. A breeze blew in from the ocean and ran the surface of the river before it. Dawn would be a long time in breaking. Across the river were the high over-hanging arc-lights along the waterfront.

Gessler won the next game too. Frankie leaned back in his chair.

'How's the time?'

Gessler looked at his wristwatch. 'Twenty minutes to six', he said, and got up and went over for the bottle off

the dressing-table. He poured two big ones into the tall beer glasses.

'Want to play some more?'

'No,' says Frankie, 'I owe you two cars and a house out at Longview. That's enough to owe anybody. No good owing anybody anything.'

Gessler put his glass down and looked at his wrist-watch again.

'I thought they would have been here now.' He had been saying that since a little after midnight.

Frankie ran his hand over his eyes. 'I'm getting out today.'

Gessler sat down. 'Take it easy. What about the fights? We'll see the commissioners. You can't stop fighting now. You're only starting out.'

'I told you already I'm through. This fight business is the same as Father Christmas in daylight.'

Gessler stared at him across the table. 'What do you mean?'

'Nothing. That's what I mean - nothing.' He got up and took a look out the window. The hotel was right on the waterfront and the high over-hanging arc-lights lit on the water out from the pilings. The water was black and oily and choppy in the breeze. An old freighter lay downstream of the hotel with her upperdeck lighted by the arc-lights.

'Going to rain soon,' says Frankie into the window. 'Going to rain when the breeze drops a little. Always could tell when it was going to rain.'

He heard Gessler pour another drink. He was still sitting at the table, shirt unbuttoned and the collar over the coat, unshaven, big and tough-looking. That was Gessler.

The sky was slow to lighten. The clouds were low across the river. It had lightened enough to see the clouds now.

Suddenly: 'What about Helen?' said Gessler

'What 'bout her?' says Frankie.

'I guess we shouldn't have gone up there that night.'

'What you take me for?' Frankie was looking at him.

'You were the real thing, Frankie. I know what I'm talking about. She's sick. She needs help.'

'You think I'm punchy? She don't need nobody's help. Anyway, what's she to you?'

Gessler stared at the half-empty bottle.

'Well,' says Frankie.

Gessler sat back on his chair. 'Ail right,' he said. 'I'll tell you. It was way back when I was doing pretty well in the fight game. Helen's mother had a rooming-house over the other side of the Island. Helen was just a kid left school then and used to sing that Spanish stuff at nights up in old Carlos Zepedo's place on the hill. She had a sister, Rita. Rita and me had been married about nine months when she died of leukaemia. I knew it was going to happen but not that soon. Well, about a year later I got the con and was away two years. When I came back, Helen was gone. Then one night I went in The Golden Oriole and there she was. That was Scheff's first place. So I took her home and told her all about him - everything. Next day she was gone again. The only time she came back was when her mother died. Now she's sick.'

'You mean she's got this thing her sister got?' says Frankie, watching his face.

'No. It's -,' said Gessler, looking at him. 'Well - it's sort of in her head.'

'How you mean, in her head?'

'I can't explain it. It's one of those complicated things. You know, technical.'

Frankie looked at him from under his brows. 'No. I guess I don't.'

'Well it isn't easy to understand. But I know she feels true about you.'

Frankie stood back from the table. 'Don't give me that. What 'bout Scheff?'

'Everybody's got to have a chance. You know that, Frankie.'

Frankie went back to the window. 'Maybe we best leave it.'

It was daylight, the morning cold and wet and the clouds driven by the breeze. The rain swept in steadily in the breeze.

'Don't you think about her, Frankie?'

Frankie turned around slowly.

'Sure. Sure, I think 'bout her. You think I'm all dumb? You think I got no feeling? Everybody seems to think I'm a freak or something. What's wrong with you all? It was me who got taken. Not you! Not her! Not Scheff! It was me! I think you're all sick in the head. That's what I think.'

'Take it easy, Frankie.'

'Take it easy? Listen, ever since I come to this town people been conning me to do this, do that, do something else. Nobody ever tell me why. They just want something. Everybody wants something. Then when it goes wrong they come ask me why. How do I know? How do I know anything? I'm just the bum they been conning. They're just a bunch of grinning Father Christmases.'

Gessler got up and put his hand on Frankie's shoulder.

'I'm sorry, Frankie. Forget it. Everything.'

'I just don't see how everybody is looking at me like it was my fault.'

'Sure. I know how you feel.'

Frankie went and lay down on the other cot Wiener had moved into the room. He lay with his eyes open so he didn't fall asleep.

Gessler sat at the table and read through the last couple of days' newspapers again. There were reports of the fight in all the papers along with photographs of the knock-out. Shorr was a pretty surprised-looking fighter for a K.O. artist. They had gone through all the papers and seen all the pictures, and Shorr looked pleasantly surprised all right.

They were both on their feet as soon as they heard the footsteps out on the stairs.

Then there was a knock on the door and Wiener said : 'All right, Harry. It's me. Jerry's here.'

Gessler opened the door. Wiener came in wearing only his vest and trousers. Behind him was this boy Jerry wearing an overcoat, and carrying one of those waterproofed hats. He was wet from the rain.

'Sorry I couldn't make it before now, Harry,' said the boy. He was dark and long-faced.

'Where's Solly?' Gessler asked.

'We couldn't shake them off. After we left Helen's place we split up.'

'Did you see her?'

'No. She wasn't in. The porter hadn't seen her either.'

Gessler looked at Frankie. Frankie didn't say anything.

'What's Scheff doing now?'

'They've been around all the usual places. We saw him and Wouk on the Island yesterday.'

'You sure nobody saw you come here?'

The boy shook his head.

'I watched them follow Solly as he drove away. He said he could lose them then was going across to see some girl who doubles at the club with Helen. After that I went across and saw Cohn. He sent you this.' He took two bulky brown envelopes from inside his coat and gave them to Gessler. 'He says maybe it would be better if you went out to his other place at Longview. As soon as he finds Helen he'll run her out to you.'

'That's fine, Jerry. Thanks.'

'That's all right, Harry,' said the boy putting his hat back on. Where he had been standing was water that had dripped from his coat.

'If you don't want me any more I'll go home and turn in.' Gessler patted him on the shoulder. 'Sure. Go ahead. Thanks again, Jerry.' The boy nodded to Frankie and started downstairs.



'What's the score, Harry?' asked Wiener who had been standing by the door.

'We'll be leaving in about an hour, Joe. All right with you?'

'All right with me, Harry,' said Wiener. 'I'll bring you breakfast up soon as I get dressed.'

They heard Wiener go downstairs, then open the side door and let Jerry out.

Gessler went over to the window. He saw the boy come around the corner and then walk on up the front with his head down against the rain. There was nobody else about. He came back to the table, picked up the envelopes and gave one to Frankie.

'That's yours. Cohn sent it,' said Gessler, watching his face. 'He's all right.'

Frankie counted the money onto the table.

'That's plenty money,' Frankie says.

'That's good money. There's nothing wrong with that money. It came off Scheff. He's lost plenty on you,' said Gessler. 'That's how you wanted it, wasn't it?'

Frankie put the money back in the envelope, folded it neatly in half and put it in the inside pocket of his windjammer.

'How far is this place of Cohn's from town?' he asked.

'About fifteen miles,' said Gessler. 'It's right by the race-track.'

Frankie didn't say anything.

'You can stay there till you decide what you want to do. Nobody knows about it. Helen will be out too. I'm getting her out of here.'

'You do what you want. I know what I'm doing.'

'What are you going to do, Frankie?'

'I'm through with it all. I'm getting out.'

They heard Wiener coming with breakfast. Harry put the money Cohn had collected for him inside his coat.

THEY CAME DOWNSTAIRS, Frankie following Gessler and carrying both the bags. Wiener was waiting for them at the bottom of the stairway. He was glad to see them go. He would do anything for Harry, but Scheff was bad trouble. Things were bad enough without Scheff.

He led them out through the bar to the side door that opened onto the street leading back from the front.

'Give me one of those bags,' said Gessler. Frankie gave him the one with the ring clothes.

Wiener opened the door and put his head out.

'It's all yours, Harry,' he said.

'Thanks again, Joe,' Gessler folded some money in his hand.

'Any time. You know that.'

'Sure, Joe.' They went out into the rain.

The street was cold and deserted, blocked in by a high derelict cannery on one side, and on the other, behind the hotel and bar, by an empty bonded warehouse. Everything was wet and dismal in the rain. They went on down the street, each carrying a bag and their collars up against the rain. They reached the long tunnel that went back under the bonded warehouse to the open loading-yard. Gessler looked both ways along the street, then they started along the tunnel, the breeze blowing in their faces from the open yard.

The rain was blowing in the mouth of the tunnel and as they stepped out Frankie saw both cars, Gessler's big one and a plum-coloured saloon tucked under the loading-ramp over in the left hand corner of the yard. He started to open his mouth and Gessler hit him heavily

with the bag and he crashed into a row of steel bins and went over onto his back. He started to get up and something whanged into the bin above him and brought the lid down. The noise deafened him. He lay where he was and tried to gather himself and one hit the wall above him and screamed off loudly with the ricochet. Two more whanged into the bins alongside him and he rolled quickly over on his belly and saw Gessler out in the mouth of the tunnel, his chin on the wet hard-packed dirt, the big Luger at arm's length and calmly squeezing off the shots in direction of the ramp.

He put his head around the bins and saw Wouk muffled in a brown overcoat step out the doorway on the ramp above the saloon, take careful aim at Gessler, and was suddenly jerked around, both hands to his belly, and went down on his face. Then the dirt kicked up close to Gessler's gun-hand, then beyond him, a little to the right, sharp and vicious, the bullet ricocheting on down the tunnel. Gessler squirmed around on his belly till he faced the other side of the yard and Frankie saw the heavy black gun buck in his hand as he fired, calmly aiming between shots, his face almost flat on the wet dirt and the wide-brimmed derby back on his head. Frankie guessed it was Kline. Then came two more shots and suddenly, it was quiet and Gessler was lying there flat out in the falling rain shoving a fresh clip up into the gun.

Frankie started to his feet and the lid off a bin came back on him followed closely by the sound of the shot. He was back on his belly, the noise ringing in his ears as somebody came out a door the far side of the yard, shooting as they ran low toward the saloon. He heard Gessler get one off but they were on the far side of the saloon now and the door opening.

Frankie, lying there behind the bins on his belly, suddenly heard somebody calling, and turning, he saw Solly and the girl running toward them; the girl at front and her face somehow not belonging to her. As she ran

he heard her calling and her mouth moving and her breath smoky in the cold; but his mind did not register any of it, nor the two shots, muffled and sounding far away through the falling rain. The girl was suddenly jolted, slowed in her stride, then came on again, her left hand holding herself low under her ribs.

He looked back at Gessler and saw him get to his feet and he got up too, and she almost made it, then stumbled, changed direction, and went down hard out in middle of the tunnel. Then he saw the boy, Solly, bareheaded and coming fast toward him. Solly hit him head-on and they both went down and rolled on the wet dirt. Gessler was down again too, and dragging himself heavily to his feet as the plum-coloured saloon roared out from under the ramp. Then with the saloon coming on fast, Gessler out in the mouth of the tunnel, made it, the big Luger at arm's-length, shoulder-high, holding himself wide-legged, emptied the clip through the wind-screen. The saloon swerved wildly, hit the right-hand corner of the tunnel, reared, and came down on Gessler with a loud grating crash and splintering and breaking of glass.

Now it was quiet and with the rain falling out in the yard and the cold breeze blowing it into the mouth of the tunnel. The two of them got up slowly and there was only the wheels of the saloon spinning in the falling rain. They did not say anything. Solly went over and looking in the saloon, saw Scheff, part of his head shot away and him jammed behind the wheel.

'There's nothing here,' he said, his voice flat and dry-sounding. 'They must've followed Jerry here this morning.'

Frankie stood there not hearing him and the rain on his face and seeing Gessler's legs sprawled out from under the saloon.

Then very quietly, his voice sounding a long way off, said : 'The girl. How's the girl?' Not turning around and not feeling anything at all.

Solly turned her over on her back.

'She's in a bad way,' he said.

Frankie knelt by her; her face white and swollen and not herself. She did not move any when she breathed. Blood oozed slowly from the corner of her mouth.

'Helen. Helen'.

Her lips moved slowly. ,

'Helen, it's me. Me'.

Her eye-lids fluttered, then slowly opened, her eyes wide and vacant, painfully trying to focus.

'Frankie'.

He put his ear close to her mouth.

'Frankie, I'm so rry. I didn't me an to - , ' she coughed in the blood in her throat.

'Don't talk, Helen. You going be all right. Just don't talk.'

'I've g ot to ta lk. I've got to t ell you. I as ked him. I did. But it's a ll right n ow. He's go ing to help me. He told me. I c an see h im. I can s ee him, Fran kie. I love you. Don't lea ve me, Frankie. Fran kie. Frank - '

'Helen! Helen! You hear me?' He was holding her head gently in his hands.

'It's no good,' said Solly.

Her eyes were closed and the rain was on her face.

He stood up slowly. Now only the rain came in the breeze in the early morning. Solly took him by the arm.

'Come on. Let's get out of here. You can't do nothing now.'

They started back along the tunnel.

'Wait!' said Solly. 'Those your bags back there?'

Frankie turned, looking back at the bags lying in the mouth of the tunnel, not seeing them, not hearing, and all of him without feeling.

'I said are those your bags?' said Solly into his face.

'Leave them.'

'We can't leave them here.' And Solly went back and got the bags, then followed Frankie out along the tunnel.

Solly moved him into the car, then hurried around

the motor, threw the bags in the back, started the motor and spun the car around fast in a tight turn in the narrow street. He cut back down the Island from the way the cars would come, then took the hill from the bottom by Chinaman's Wharf. It was still raining. It would rain all day. The wipers worked the rain from the windscreen.

'You all right?' asked Solly.

Frankie turned slowly, looking at him. 'Yeah. Yeah, sure'.

'It shook me too,' said Solly, still flat-voiced. 'I didn't know you were leaving. I found her this morning and she wanted to come down.'

They were far up the hill now, it raining, and the traffic light.

'I'm getting out of town,' Solly went on. 'Where do you want to go?'

'This'll do,' says Frankie, looking straight ahead through the rain-washed windscreen. 'Right here.'

Solly shrugged, and pulled the car over to the kerb.

'You mean here?'

'This'll do.' Frankie got out the car.

'Hey! The bags,' Solly called after him.

'Thanks.' Frankie took the bags.

Solly watched him walk away through the rain, white-faced, wide-shouldered, heels on the ground and walking sort of flat-footed.

FRANKIE HAD BEEN SITTING in at the counter of the bar since ten o'clock in the morning. The barman stood at the top of the counter leaning over the morning paper and, occasionally glancing down the bar at Frankie. The bar-

man had long given up trying to talk to him. All he did now was fill the glass when it was empty and Frankie would put the money down. There was only the two of them in the bar and it was very quiet and the rain beat on the windows and the traffic out on the hill sounded very distant with the doors shut.

The bar was old-fashioned and the walls panelled from floor to ceiling with smoke-darkened oak, and down the end of the bar was a big cast-iron fireplace with a coal fire burning. The panelled walls were decorated with faded pictures of race-horses, and on the top shelves behind the counter the fake bottles with faded, smoke-darkened labels, and propped against the bottles were the latest ad's for beers. And Frankie saw none of this; but sitting there, stared at the half-empty glass, then turned it around a few times, and stared at it some more.

Some time after eleven o'clock, the doors opened and an old man, very wet from the rain, came in and slowly walked down to the end of the bar and took a chair by the fire. The old man didn't say anything, nor did the barman, but seeing Frankie's glass empty, refilled it, then went to see the old man.

And Frankie saw none of this; but sitting there, stared at the full glass.

The barman came back, measured a drink into a glass and took it to the old man. The old man was very tired, and he sat on the chair with the glass in his hand, and though his eyes were no longer bright and alive, he saw many things in the burning coals.

On about mid-day, the doors opened and two long-shoremen came in talking loudly. The oilskins were shiny with rain and the rain ran off them onto the floor.

'Two big ones, Mac,' said the thin one.

The barman measured the drinks and the two men took their oilskins off and hung them on the end of a booth. Back at the counter, the tall one looked along the bar and saw Frankie on the stool and the old man by

the fire. He nudged the thin one and he too looked along the bar, then they both looked at the barman and he looked at the ceiling.

Frankie was thinking and he was thinking very deeply and he was talking in to himself and he was saying: 'That was Christmas again the same like Christmas -'

And the barman not hearing him talk all morning thought he was talking to him and he said: 'What's that?'

And Frankie was saying: '- and always Christmas like Father Christmas all big and with lights and the white beard and the sack on his back and all lights and the lights going out and him on a sled with the lights back on and them going out and suddenly it's all lights and he's holding his hand out shake yours -'

'Sure,' said the barman. 'Sure. That's good.' Then him looking at the two longshoremen and them looking strangely at Frankie.

'- but you never don't shake hands really because there no hand to shake and next morning you see that true because lights the same as dreams and they in't never there in daylight.'

'You all right?' said the barman, putting his hand on Frankie's shoulder.

'The day,' says Frankie, never yet looking up.

'The day?' said the barman. 'Today's Friday.'

'She see him. He come today.'

'Yeah?' said the barman.

'Yeah. She see him. God come on Friday.'

Only the wind blew the rain against the windows and the traffic out on the hill sounded very distant.

'I think you better go on home now, kid,' said the barman.

Frankie raised his eyes slowly, then got down off the stool, and the way he held himself you could see he was pretty well on drunk. He stood away from the counter and looked down at the bags, then started slowly toward the door.



'Hey!' called the barman. 'Your bags.'

Frankie stopped, turned around slowly, and to nobody at all, says: 'Don't need them no more.'

They watched him walk out into the rain, holding himself, heels on the ground, sort of flat-footed, his head a little to the right and his chin down.

The old man thought he would get some air. Sitting by the fire was all right but when the pictures started to run badly it was time to get some air even if it was raining.

'Who was that?' said the thin one when Frankie was gone.

'Never saw him before,' said the barman. 'Looking at his face I'd say he was some sort of fighter.'

'Wonder what he meant when he said, "God came on Friday"?' said the thin one.

'He was punchy,' said the tall one. 'You could see he was punchy.'

'Yeah, I guess he was punchy all right,' the thin one said.

'He looked a bum to me.'

'He wasn't any bum,' said the old man with steam rising from his coat. 'He could have been the middleweight champion of the world.'

None of them said anything, and the old man, not in any hurry, pulled his collar up and went out into the rain.

'Here. Pass me those bags up,' said the barman.

The thin one set the bags on the counter. The barman zipped the big one open and brought out the green and white silk bathrobe. 'Say,' he said.

'You could get something on that,' the tall one said.

'Yeah,' said the thin one. 'He could have been the middleweight champion of the world.'